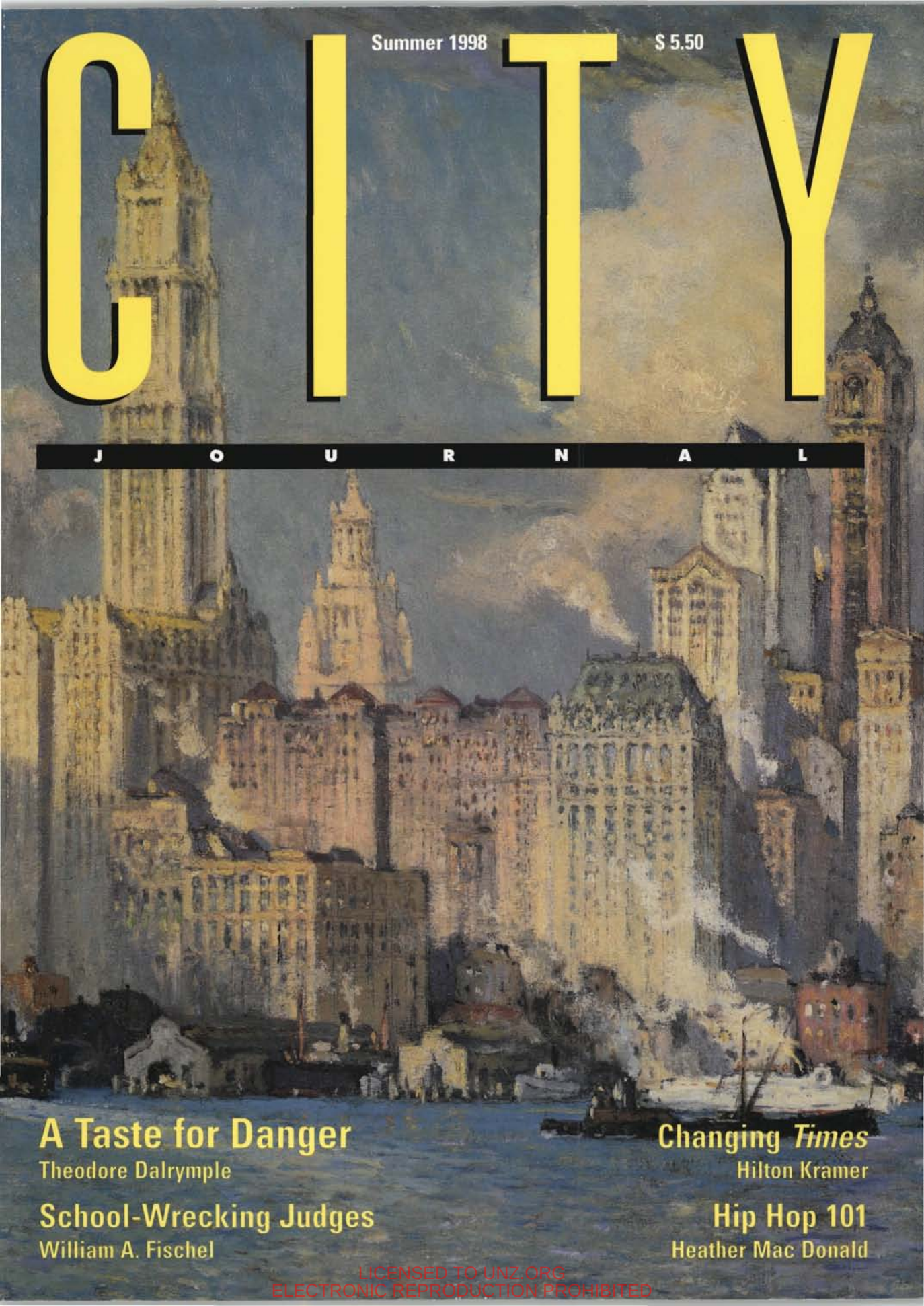
Summer 1998 $ 5.50

CITY

JOURNAL



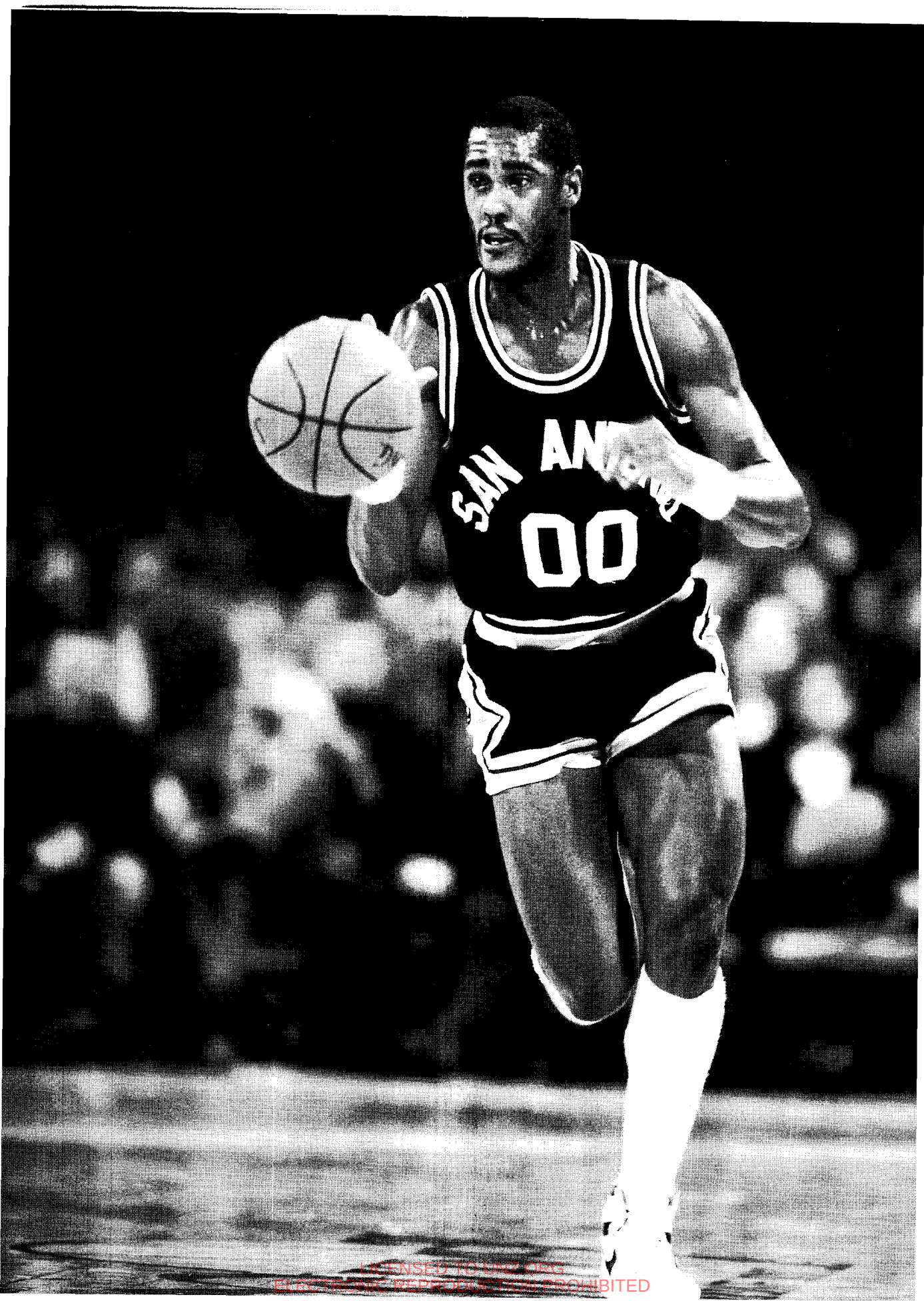
A Taste for Danger
Theodore Dalrymple

School-Wrecking Judges
William A. Fischel

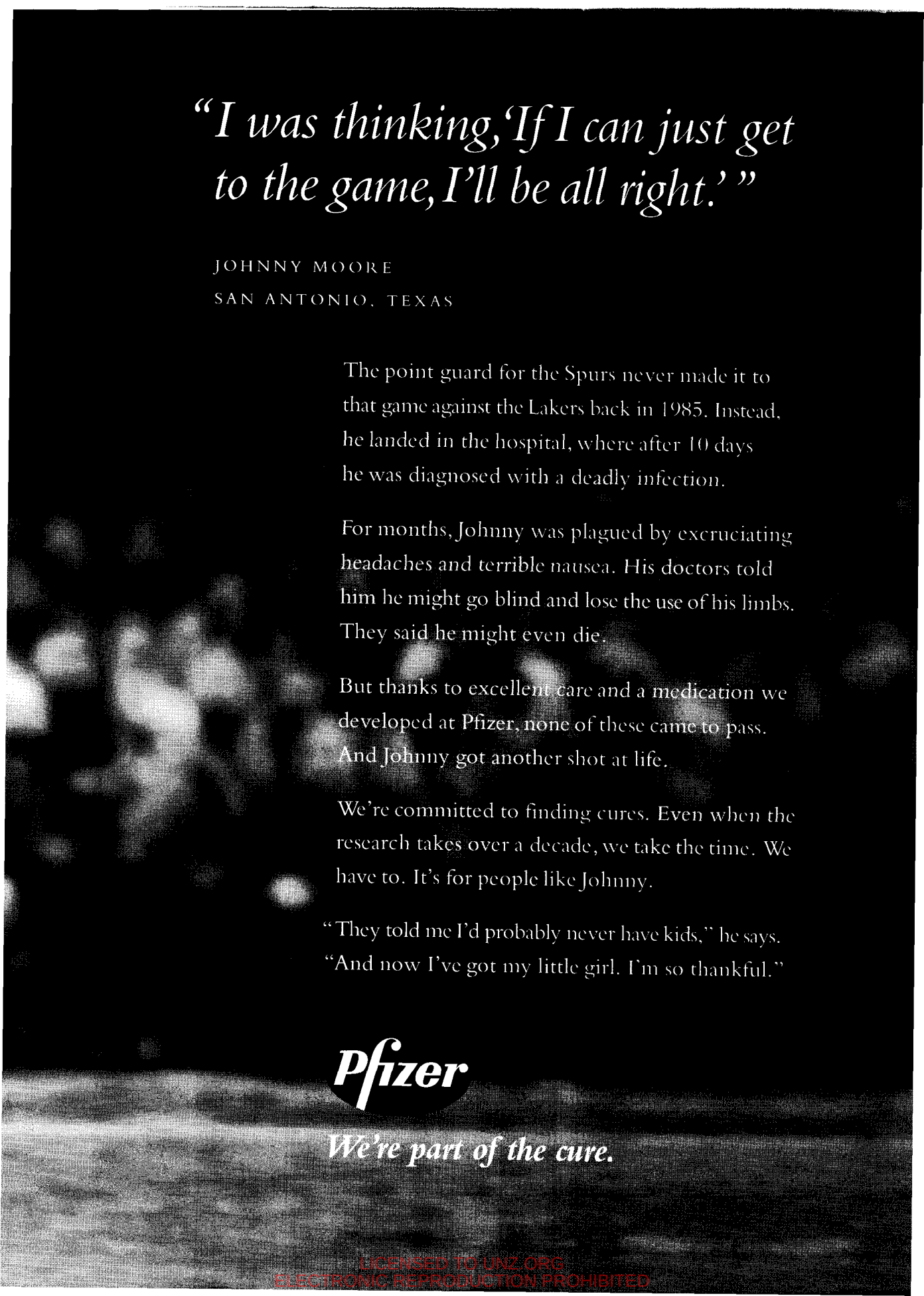
Changing *Times*
Hilton Kramer

Hip Hop 101
Heather Mac Donald

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



"I was thinking, 'If I can just get to the game, I'll be all right.'"

JOHNNY MOORE
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

The point guard for the Spurs never made it to that game against the Lakers back in 1985. Instead, he landed in the hospital, where after 10 days he was diagnosed with a deadly infection.

For months, Johnny was plagued by excruciating headaches and terrible nausea. His doctors told him he might go blind and lose the use of his limbs. They said he might even die.

But thanks to excellent care and a medication we developed at Pfizer, none of these came to pass. And Johnny got another shot at life.

We're committed to finding cures. Even when the research takes over a decade, we take the time. We have to. It's for people like Johnny.

"They told me I'd probably never have kids," he says. "And now I've got my little girl. I'm so thankful."

Pfizer

We're part of the cure.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CITY
JOURNAL
Published by the Manhattan Institute
Summer 1998 Volume 8, Number 3

Editor
Myron Magnet

Senior Editor
Brian C. Anderson

Contributing Editors
Theodore Dalrymple, David Gelernter,
Kay S. Hymowitz, Stefan Kanfer,
Heather Mac Donald, Richard E. Morgan,
Peter Reinharz, Wendy Shalit, Sol Stern,
William J. Stern

Art Director
Sandra Di Pasqua

Picture Editor
Susan Rubin

Editorial Assistant
Edward Craig

Production Manager
Jerome Rufino

Publication Committee
Richard Aspinwall, *Chase Manhattan Bank*
Gary Bogard, *New York, N.Y.*
Eugene D. Brody, *Oppenheimer Capital*
Geoffrey Colvin, *Fortune Magazine*
Edward N. Costikyan, *Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison*
John Craig, *The Commonwealth Fund*
Peter Davidson, *El Diario-La Prensa*
Richard Gilder, *Gilder, Gagnon, Howe & Co.*
Nathan Glazer, *Harvard University*
Edward W. Hayes, *New York, N.Y.*
H. Dale Hemmerdinger, *The Hemmerdinger Corporation*
Edward R. Hintz, *Hintz, Holman & Hecksher Inc.*
Steven Klinsky, *Forstmann, Little & Company*
Marie-Josée Kravis, *Hudson Institute*
Roy Marden, *Philip Morris Companies*
Howard Milstein, *Douglas Elliman-Gibbons & Ives*
Joseph L. Rice III, *Clayton, Dubilier & Rice, Inc.*
Peter D. Salins, *State University of New York*
Joan C. Schwartz, *New York, N.Y.*
Howard Shawn, *New York, N.Y.*
Thomas J. Tisch, *FLF Associates*
Barrie A. Wigmore, *Goldman, Sachs & Company*
Louis Winnick, *Fund for the City of New York*
Kathryn Wylde, *New York City Investment Fund*

2 Cover painting by Colin Campbell Cooper (detail)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Contents

Theodore Dalrymple	12	**A Taste for Danger** When you've seen anarchy, you properly value civilization.
William A. Fischel	30	**How Judges Are Making Public Schools Worse** In the name of fairness and equality, courts across the nation have outlawed using local property taxes to pay for schools. The result: worse education for all.
Hilton Kramer	43	**Reflections on the Changing *Times*** How a once great journalistic enterprise became hip and trashy.
Heather Mac Donald	56	**An F for Hip-Hop 101** At El Puente Academy, progressive education's quest for "relevance" produces mighty strange results.
Tucker Carlson	66	**The Politics of Virtue** Republicans have won the national debate over economics. Now two leading mainstream presidential contenders are turning to the culture, determined to roll back the excesses of the 1960s.
Sol Stern and Bruno V. Manno	73	**A School Reform Whose Time Has Come** Thirty-three states boast charter schools—fully public schools demonstrably superior to those the public education monopoly runs. What's keeping New York from climbing on board?
Sally Satel	81	**Do Drug Courts Really Work?** Drug courts offer criminal addicts a choice: either enter and complete treatment or go to jail. Here's why they've sparked such enthusiasm.

Urbanities

Harry Stein	88	**Pulling the Plug**
David Watkin	94	**An Eloquent Sermon in Stone**

Departments

	5	**In Prospect**
	6	**Soundings** Criminal Entitlements, Ex-Con Caregivers, Potty Police, . . . and other matters.
Theodore Dalrymple	108	**Oh, to be in England** Zero Intolerance
	114	**Letters**
	119	**Contributors**
John Leo	120	**Commencement Diarist** Lite Wisdom

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

We'll let our readers tell you why they never miss an issue.

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani

"*City Journal* has provided a forum for some of our city's—and our nation's—most incisive thinkers, whose writings have enriched our public discourse and helped shape public policy. In the pages of *City Journal*, theorists and practitioners meet, and new approaches to governance emerge. I look forward to many more years of informative, provocative reading."

Tom Wolfe

"*City Journal* is the great Fool Killer in the arena of urban policy. It's more than sharp and penetrating. It's a joy to read."

Mayor Stephen Goldsmith

"*City Journal* is simply an indispensable handbook for anyone interested in urban issues. In Indianapolis City Hall, every issue of *City Journal* gets cut up, copied, passed around, and talked about."

George Will

"*City Journal* is consistently the most stimulating source of reporting and analysis concerning the nation's urban problems."

Mayor John Norquist

"*City Journal* is the definitive forum for the best new ideas in urban government. I love *City Journal*, the magazine dedicated to rebuilding urban civilization."

Bill Moyers

"Even when I disagree with *City Journal*, I dare not ignore it."

Order now, at our **subscription price** of $19.95/yr. (four issues)—a 10% **savings** off the newsstand price. **Call (800) 562-1973.**

CITY JOURNAL, SUBSCRIPTION DEPARTMENT, P.O. BOX 3000, DENVILLE, NJ 07834

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY STATE ZIP

❑ $19.95 for one year (4 quarterly issues) ❑ $34.95 for two years (8 quarterly issues)

❑ Payment enclosed ❑ Please bill me

City Journal. Ideas that work.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In Prospect

CITY JOURNAL articles often secretly aspire to transcend journalism and achieve the condition of literature, and none have so triumphantly succeeded in doing so as this issue's extraordinary lead story, contributing editor Theodore Dalrymple's "A Taste for Danger." Here "literature" doesn't mean "fiction," à la Stephen Glass or Patricia Smith; it means literature as George Orwell practiced it in such classic essays as "Shooting an Elephant" or "Such, Such Were the Joys"—fiercely honest pieces of concrete reporting that go beyond the particulars at hand to illuminate universal truths. It is a large claim, to be sure: but Dalrymple's essay may well rest on the shelf next to Orwell 100 years from now—if mankind still reads.

Dalrymple likes to travel to what Joseph Conrad called "the dark places of the earth"—the darker the better. He likes to visit war, revolution, social collapse, partly for what such anarchy teaches him about human nature, stripped of its customary drapery of civilized life. And what he learns is how much that drapery of civilization humanizes people, transforming *homo sapiens* from weasels fighting in a hole into creatures capable of achieving decency, dignity, self-respect, and compassion.

Into something more, in other words, than a brute or a mechanism. But armies of thinkers seem to view man as merely that. For instance, whenever someone parrots the inhuman *cliché*, fathered by Le Corbusier, that "a house is a machine for living," one can't help replying: Yes, but only if a person is a machine for—what? Presumably for performing all those mechanical functions that in Corbusier's arid, bureaucratic utopia make up the sum of human life. It was this dehumanizing spirit that Edmund Burke saw at the center of the French Revolution. It came easy to the revolutionaries to kill the king and queen because of this spirit, Burke argues: they lacked reverence not only for royalty and womanhood but for humanity. "On [their] scheme of things," he says, "a king is but a man, a queen is but a woman; a woman is but an animal, and an animal not of the highest order." Any idea that would make them more is fiction and superstition.

But all the ideals that make us human are fictions and superstitions—manmade constructs such as honor and duty, decency and forbearance, and above all the idea of our own humanity—which become real if we believe in them and live our lives by them. That's the truth Dalrymple comes to: there's nothing more moving, more worthy of respect in his eyes, than the millennia of effort, continuing in our own lives, that have made us men, not brutes.

That transformation is the work of culture; and in their different ways, many stories in this issue bear on how culture does its work well or ill. David Watkin's article on the Houses of Parliament, "An Eloquent Sermon in Stone" (page 94), shows how good architecture, operating on principles diametrically opposed to Le Corbusier's, expresses ideals and holds them up as a standard for life. In our own day, if education is one of the main channels by which culture transmits ideals, the goings-on at one of New York's public high schools that Heather Mac Donald describes in "An F for Hip-Hop 101" (page 56) should cause disquiet about how debased a version of culture New York's students are receiving. Though its subject is much more upscale, Hilton Kramer's "Reflections on the Changing *Times*" (page 43) examines a related cultural debasement: it shows how the nation's newspaper of record absorbed the 1960s' cultural revolution and now retails a prosperous, indulgent decadence whose highest concerns are "lifestyle" issues, from planning a menu to choosing a sexual "orientation."

But those who deplore such cultural developments are not powerless. If you are worried that TV's steady diet of trashy nihilism and vulgarity will coarsen your kids' imagination, the solution, as Harry Stein explains in "Pulling the Plug" on page 88, is simple. And as Tucker Carlson reports in "The Politics of Virtue" on page 66, the next presidential race may very well center on how to restore the nation's traditional ideals after the cultural ravages that the 1960s left behind.

For though those traditional ideals may be manmade fictions, centuries of human experience, as Dalrymple learned on his dark journeys, have shown that they lead to the best of which man is capable. •

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Soundings

Criminal Entitlements

Because taxpayers pay for the room, board, and medical expenses of incarcerated criminals, jailbirds aren't eligible to receive most entitlements. But fraud is rampant: a recent *Wall Street Journal* op-ed observed that 60,000 convicted violent offenders have been regularly getting social security checks in the mail, cheating U.S. taxpayers out of an estimated $500 million every year.

In New York, similar practices flourish. One that's easy to stop involves young offenders. Their families often receive public assistance. But though a family's assistance level, which is supposed to vary with the number of minors living at home, should diminish when one of their children is behind bars, it seldom does. Since local social service agencies don't receive lists of criminal offenders to match against their own recipient lists, they rarely find out when a family is cheating.

It's only common sense to require corrections departments to send inmate lists to local public assistance agencies so they can modify family payments accordingly. It makes sense, too, to automate such list sharing, to allow agencies to increase or diminish public assistance payments electronically. Incarceration in a juvenile facility costs state governments huge sums of money—over $75,000 yearly per juvenile delinquent in New York State. Wasting additional millions on unwarranted welfare payments is an affront to taxpayers. Reform would also send a healthy message to the young offenders and their families that there's a cost to crime.

—Peter Reinharz

UFT Dress Code

Not long ago, the Board of Education approved a resolution that required students in New York City's public elementary schools to wear uniforms. Fine, but isn't it a bit odd to make Johnny wear a shirt and tie to school while Johnny's teachers continue to dress as if they've just been playing Frisbee on the Great Lawn? Seeing the problem, Mayor Giuliani suggested the logical next step: a dress code for teachers. Unfortunately, the mayor seemingly forgot that the city's labor contract with the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) has little to do with logic. Under it, school principals can't use personal appearance as part of a teacher's evaluation.

And sure enough: a UFT newsletter shouted, "Not so fast, Mr. Mayor!" as though teachers were about to lose a hard-won human right. "A dress code requires negotiation," warned union president Randi Weingarten. Asking teachers to look minimally presentable in front of their pupils, Weingarten complained, was "a diversion from the real job at hand." In a typical rhetorical dig at the mayor, Weingarten asked, "How about first establishing a building code?"

From Weingarten's reaction, it's clear that if a dress code for teachers ever did get to City Hall's negotiating table, the UFT's opening statement would run like this: "Mr. Mayor, as long as our members have to teach in decaying, dirty school buildings, you can't expect them to dress for work like other city employees. But if you really believe that the way teachers present themselves in the classroom is important, that it has something to do with children learning, we're prepared to deal: an extra week of vacation for a shirt and tie. Jackets will cost you more. By the way, Mr. Mayor, if we do reach an agreement on the dress code, we could jointly announce it as another historic breakthrough for education reform."

—Sol Stern

A Sweetheart Deal

In May, New York mayor Rudolph Giuliani, fulfilling a campaign promise, proposed what would be America's most sweeping domestic partnership benefits for the unmarried companions, whether heterosexual or homosexual, of New York City's municipal employees or of anyone taking advantage of city services like public housing. Domestic partners would henceforth be enti-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tled to benefits ranging from health insurance to the right to inherit the lease of a rent-controlled apartment.

At first glance, such a move may appear enlightened and compassionate: in a world where love seems in short supply, why not honor and recognize it wherever it flourishes? But what looks like compassion for individuals has deleterious effects for society as a whole. The mayor's measure is but the latest victory in the long campaign to make traditional marriage only one kind of family, no more valuable than an array of alternative family structures—only one "lifestyle choice" out of a smorgasbord of equally valid options.

But for public policy, the traditional family is now demonstrably superior for raising children and forming citizens who can finish school, find jobs, obey the laws, stay married, and bring into the world yet another generation of self-governing Americans. Society has every interest, therefore, in promoting the formation of such families and strengthening them in every possible way. That's why certain privileges have always applied to traditional spouses alone. Extending those privileges to unmarried domestic partners, regardless of sex, removes the unique status that society has hitherto rightly striven to perpetuate.

In his State of the City speech this year, the mayor acknowledged that single parent families were very far from ideal for raising sturdy children and that urban America's epidemic of illegitimacy was a scourge. But it's hard to see how the mayor can argue against illegitimacy if by his domestic partnership proposal he has in effect legitimated it.

That's the moral cost of this proposal, but it also has a fiscal cost. New York City already provides its employees with benefits well over twice as costly as in other big cities. This proposal will only bloat the cost of those benefits further—benefits that accompany the employee right up to his death and indeed are immortal. For as we learn from the mayor's new proposal they include, for city employees, their families, and now their domestic partners, free burial in Canarsie cemetery.

—Myron Magnet

HARVEY WANG (3)

Potty Police

While civil libertarians warn us about Big Brother invading the bedroom, maybe they should look down the hall a little bit—to the bathroom. There, the nanny state has been trying to re-toilet-train us.

Most toilets used to flush with a more-than-sufficient 3.5 gallons of water, or even a cascading 5 gallons. In the early nineties, though, some environmentally concerned states began passing "low-flow" laws that limited toilet flushes to a miserly 1.6 gallons, since big johns, they claimed, worsened the nation's supposed water shortage. The toilet industry, frustrated by the confusing array of state standards, teamed up with environmentalists to press for a low federal flush—as long as it was uniform.

Congress listened and in 1992 passed the Energy Policy Conservation Act. The law required all new toilets to com-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Soundings

ply with the 1.6-gallon standard, but predictably enough, it had messy unintended consequences. For most people, one flush no longer does the job, so they flush and flush again, sending any water-saving benefits swirling down the drain.

People just don't like the new toilets. For a while, enterprising folks got around the 1.6-gallon law by buying bigger commercial toilets—until the feds forced business johns to comply with the new standard, too. Since federal law only banned manufacturers from making new bigger toilets, however, it left some still in circulation. A black market in full-flushers soon emerged.

Enter the potty police. New York and a few other states, cracking down on the underground market, enacted statutes that forced developers and home owners to install low-flow toilets anytime they built or did major renovations. To sell or install an environmentally incorrect potty became a crime.

Still, folks with the old-model johns hung on to them for dear life. So several cities, with New York leading the way, decided to reimburse people who got rid of the old models and replaced them with low-flow toilets. Predictably, New York City's Toilet Rebate proved to be a flush offer of up to $240 for a replaced bowl—almost five times what Tampa pays, over twice what Los Angeles doles out, and considerably more than the actual labor and material costs to have a low-flow toilet installed. In fact, the city's subsidy was so generous that plumbers in other areas of the country complained it dried up the nationwide supply of low-flow johns.

Representative Joe Knollenberg (R.-Michigan) has introduced a federal bill—with considerable support—to repeal the 1992 law and return to the happy days of one man, one flush. But even if the bill passes, it'll still be a crime to get a 3.5-gallon toilet in New York State.

—E. V. Kontorovich

Ex-Con Caregivers

Nursing homes, we like to think, are places where older folks get loving care in their twilight years. But there's a growing fear that many nursing homes have been harboring staff with criminal pasts and that nursing home abuse is on the rise.

Every year, New York's Medicaid Fraud Control Unit receives close to 1,000 reports of suspected nursing home abuse or neglect. In one horrific recent incident, an aide for the Greater Harlem Nursing Home was charged with scalding a 90-year-old resident. The female victim, who has dementia, suffered second-degree burns and had skin torn from one leg as a result of the abuse.

New York isn't the only state with horror stories. As the *Wall Street Journal* reports, in one San Antonio nursing home investigators discovered that half of the 69 male workers had arrest records, and nearly one-quarter had felony convictions. Over a two-year period ending in 1996, a Colorado court found, the Cedars Health Care Center hired 74 aides with rap sheets. The problem is national in scope: in 1997, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services logged a 14 percent increase in nursing home abuse since 1994.

Thirty-six states have sensibly passed laws requiring back-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ground checks for caregivers at hospitals and nursing homes and tougher punishment for crimes against the elderly. New York isn't one of the 36 yet, though that may soon change. Attorney General Dennis Vacco's proposed "Kathy's Law"—named after a comatose Rochester nursing-home resident raped and impregnated by a nurses' aide—would strengthen penalties against those convicted of harming nursing-home residents, and, more important, require new nurses' aides and home health care workers to submit to a background check using the state's criminal database. At present, nursing homes are not allowed access to the database, so even if they wanted to do background checks, they couldn't. Vacco's law would obviously change that.

Given mounting evidence that nursing homes can be anything but safe harbors for the old and weary, the Legislature should pass Kathy's Law.

—Carol W. LaGrasse

The Stadium Game

Many New Yorkers are balking at Mayor Giuliani's proposal to build a taxpayer-financed stadium for the New York Yankees on Manhattan's West Side. They may have a point.

Yankee boss George Steinbrenner's blackmail—no stadium, says he, then maybe goodbye Yankees—hasn't helped warm New Yorkers to the proposal. Why should multi-millionaire Steinbrenner reap the biggest individual benefit from the project? And isn't this unnecessary corporate welfare? If we're going to pay for a new Yankee Stadium, why not build Kmart a warehouse or Morgan Stanley a skyscraper office?

Of course, public officials don't treat sports franchises as ordinary businesses: a beloved team becomes part of a city's identity. These days, too, people seem to believe that stadiums won't get built anywhere in America without public subsidy.

But Europeans may have found a better—and more market-friendly—way to build and renovate stadiums. Since Margaret Thatcher's free-market England during the 1980s, and then spreading to statist France and Italy more recently, soccer franchises have been going on the stock market.

A 1989 tragedy turned U.K. soccer teams to the market in earnest. Soccer hooligans had provoked a stampede across a stadium "standing area," crushing scores of fans. Officials subsequently banned standing areas from most soccer stadiums, reducing the number of fans who could attend a game and thus making teams less profitable.

To renovate and build seated stadiums with corporate boxes and better facilities, a number of teams hit upon the Thatcherite solution of issuing publicly traded debt or selling stock to the public. Nineteen teams—including storied Manchester United—now list themselves on the London Stock Exchange, as well as the smaller Alternative Investment Market; more teams are preparing to go public in the future. Though soccer-team shares bounce with team fortune, investors have mostly favored them.

Why can't Steinbrenner and other owners, instead of clamoring for taxpayer subsidies, raise money for better facilities on the financial markets like the owners of any other big business?

—Jonathan Foreman

Cut the Ribbon and Run

Stories of New York City's public schools crumbling while officials demand billion-dollar bond issues to rebuild them call to mind a day in June 1988, when Mayor Ed Koch, flanked by cameramen and reporters, ebulliently announced that subway service would be restored on the reopened Williamsburg Bridge. Two months earlier, inspectors found such extensive corrosion that they feared the bridge would soon collapse into the East River. When asked how corrosion had advanced so far, Koch admitted that the bridge's maintenance budget had been appropriated for other purposes.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

American cities tend to let things fall apart before they fix them. Political incentives reinforce this: TV cameras record ribbon cuttings, but not routine maintenance. And payments for routine maintenance are operating-budget items, painfully paid in full by current taxpayers, while the cost of major restoration is spread out through bonds. A strong incentive exists, then, for politicians to pay for tomorrow what they should pay for today. Of course, the use of bonds for major restoration instead of current-year budget items for maintenance virtually guarantees that accumulated interest payments will double the final cost to the taxpayers.

Federal programs invite putting off maintenance, too, since federal infrastructure grants primarily target new construction. Under the recent $200 billion Transportation Equity Act for the Twenty-First Century, for example, state and local governments receive a proffered $4 for every $1 they contribute only if the funds go to big capital projects. If state and local governments want to do routine maintenance, tough luck, they're on their own, except for the Act's tiny allocations for maintenance. A University of North Carolina study pointed out that "as the capital focus diverts funds from maintenance, the overall quality of the existing system declines."

Though the "cut the ribbon and run" syndrome is difficult to prevent, the use of bond "maintenance covenants" might provide a partial answer to perpetually deferred maintenance. Here's how they might work. Let the federal transportation program require participating state and local governments to guarantee in bond financing documents that they will keep facilities in the same pristine condition they were in when first built. Such maintenance covenants have been used successfully in the past for revenue producing projects like toll bridges and roads. Other required covenants might mandate annual public reports that describe how the structure is holding up. At O'Hare Airport, for example, an independent consultant makes a report each year on needed improvements.

With all major public borrowings, bank trustees usually represent bondholders' interests. If a covenant is breached—for example, if the covenanter hasn't prevented a bridge from crumbling—the trustee can seek to enforce the covenant by court decree. The ultimate savings to taxpayers would be monumental. —*Ned Regan*

Unjamming Traffic

New York City's drivers waste a staggering $7.9 billion—$580 per eligible driver—in gas, productivity, and time stuck in traffic around and in the city, according to the Texas Transportation Institute. Rush hour is a cruel misnomer in Gotham: 70 percent of commuter traffic goes nowhere fast; only Los Angeles's traffic moves more slowly. Tangled traffic also worsens air quality: the EPA says vehicle emissions are 250 percent worse when drivers idle, start, and stop frequently, as they commonly do in traffic jams.

New York could ease its traffic woes by extending market mechanisms to transportation through "congestion pricing." With congestion pricing, a tunnel or bridge would cost more to use during rush hour than during off-peak periods, just as it costs more to go to a movie at 8PM than it does to see a matinee. The idea is to give drivers a sharp financial incentive to avoid too-busy routes at peak traffic times. It would take only a small percentage of commuters switching to off-peak hours to unclog key roadways. Congestion pricing has improved traffic flow, cut commuting time up to 40 percent, and proved popular with drivers from San Francisco to Toronto.

If congestion pricing works so well, why hasn't New York City seen any more of it? The main obstacle is fear that the system would punish low-income commuters. A serious charge—if true.

But the critics haven't proven their case. A 1990 feasibility study for congestion pricing on San Francisco's Bay Bridge found that most peak-hour

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

commuters were far from poor: the average commuter's yearly income was $68,000; only 3 percent had incomes below 150 percent of the poverty rate. New York City's commuters, many of whom live in wealthy Westchester County north of the city, would probably have a comparable income breakdown.

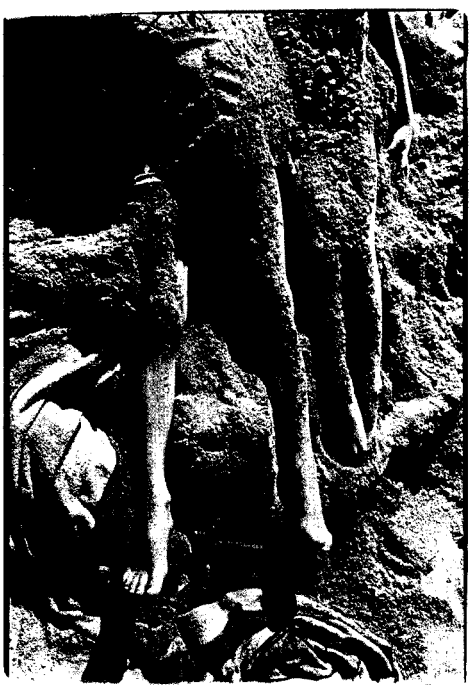
More important, the California Polytechnic Institute discovered that it's not just the rich yuppie who will pay the peak fees: an economically representative cross-section of drivers will do so. The key is not how much a commuter makes but how much he values his time. Those who prefer to save money will switch to mass transit or to a carpool, or will drive at a less hectic time of the day. Since congestion pricing smoothes traffic flow, buses, which the poor use disproportionately, will move along at a much faster clip. So on balance, congestion pricing is more likely to benefit than to harm low-income city residents and commuters.

New York City's bridges and tunnels offer an excellent opportunity for successful congestion pricing. Electronic toll collection, like the E-Z Passes that are already being used throughout the city, would make it a cinch to implement. It's time to free up Gotham's traffic.

—*Erin Schiller*

What Gives?

Al and Tipper Gore gave $353 to charity in 1997—about 0.18 percent of their $197,729 income and one-third the average amount given by Americans who donated to charities last year. The Gore's parsimony caused the vice president some well-deserved embarrassment. After all, aren't liberals supposed to be more caring?



Looking at U.S. philanthropic giving as a whole, there's more embarrassing news for "compassionate" liberals. Recent studies from the nonprofit Independent Sector and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics show that the folks most ready to offer their time and money are married, employed, college-educated, churchgoing white parents of young children. Fully 71 percent of regular churchgoers do volunteer work—almost twice the rate for non-churchgoers. Not an overwhelmingly liberal bunch.

Regional differences tell a similar tale. According to the Internal Revenue Service, the six New England states—which tend to be liberal politically—are the most Scrooge-like. Greater Boston, for example, ranks fourth nationwide among American cities in per-capita income; in charitable giving it ranks 28th.

But if New Englanders are stingy givers, where can we find the most generous Americans? Utah is on top, according to the IRS, with the average contribution a munificent $4,593 (compared with Massachusetts' $1,919). The next in line are Wyoming, Tennessee, Mississippi, Texas, Alabama, Arkansas, and Louisiana—again, not exactly the most left-wing states in the union. Of the ten most unstinting states, eight voted for Bob Dole in the 1996 presidential election; nine of the ten most miserly states supported Bill Clinton.

All of which skirts an interesting question: will it look better or worse when the Gores, remembering the criticism of 1997, give several thousand dollars to charity in 1998?

—*Jason Bertsch*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A Taste for Danger

Theodore Dalrymple

On a recent visit to New York, I stepped from the remarkably rich and elegant world of Madison Avenue into a photographic exhibition entitled *Requiem* at the Newseum. The stores, galleries, and boutiques of the Upper East Side had given me great pleasure; but the contemplation of silk ties, no matter how beautifully designed and exquisitely made, bores me after a while, and I begin to suffer acutely from *nostalgie de la boue*. I have explored the dark underside of life for too long to remain contented with its sunny uplands for more than a few hours at a time.

Requiem was an exhibition of photographs of the Vietnam War taken by photographers who were themselves killed in it. This gave the exhibition a special poignancy: some of the pictures were printed from the photographers' last roll of film or were even of the last thing they saw before their death. It would have taken a strange kind of intellectual obtuseness or emotional unresponsiveness not to have reacted deeply to these photographs of bravery, cowardice, cruelty, torture, pain, treachery, comradeship, terror, death, destruction, and inconsolable grief—all in a landscape of unequaled beauty that had long been home to a delicate and refined civilization. We see, *inter alia*, an aircrew chief weeping after a failed mission in which his comrades were killed; a woman being interrogated by having her head held under the water of a river, her interrogator gripping her by the hair; a failed attempt at mouth-to-mouth resuscitation of a wounded infantryman; the silhouette of a dead soldier being hoisted aboard a helicopter. And we read the last message received from a

When you've seen anarchy, you properly value civilization.

HENRI HUET/AP

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Cambodian photographer working for the AP, as the Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh: "I alone in post office. . . . I have so numerous stories to cover. . . . I feel rather trembling. . . . Maybe last cable today and forever."

The first pictures in the exhibition, however, were of the Indochinese landscape before the war had extended to every part of it. I doubt that there is a more serene landscape anywhere in the world, and I count myself fortunate to have traveled through it several years after the ending of the war, when the serenity—superficially, at least—had returned. Vietnam was then emerging from its isolation, but visitors were still few. I had the imperial tombs at Hue entirely to myself—not another person in sight or, more important still, within earshot—and I can hardly expect ever again to experience such complete tranquility. The architecture, the gardens, and the landscape were in the most perfect harmony, to be appreciated fully only in silence and solitude.

Of course, hundreds of thousands of people had been killed that I might enjoy my little aesthetic epiphany. I had, unwittingly, taken advantage of a window of opportunity to experience it, for soon afterward, no doubt, the tour buses would start to arrive, with all the ugliness and despoliation that mass tourism entails. There is no contest between Confucius and Coca-Cola. Meanwhile, to the north, the people of puritanical Hanoi had begun to partake of the joys of frivolity for the first time in nearly half a century. Private market stalls had just been permitted, dance halls had opened, and ice cream was available again. To see the innocent pleasure people took in these small things, after so grim a period of history, was moving indeed; but I knew that, in the not distant future, the growth of the tender green shoots of a consumer society would render impossible the kind of quasi-mystical experience that Hue had offered me.

I recalled a passage in Mary McCarthy's book *Hanoi*, written at the height of the conflict in 1968, when she visited that city. Miss McCarthy had a conversation with the prime minister of North Vietnam, Pham Van Dong, about the *quality* (her emphasis) of Vietnamese life. "Material scarcity," she wrote, "is regarded as a piece of good luck. . . . He [Pham Van Dong] spoke of our automobile-TV culture as of something distastefully gross and heavy; Vietnamese ethics are permeated with ideas of lightness and swift pliability: bamboo, bicycles, sandals, straw. . . . With a full-lipped contempt . . . he rejected the notion of a socialist consumer society." It did not occur to Miss McCarthy, who perceived and reported such wonders in Hanoi as the triumph of socialism over acne, to ask at whose behest, or on what moral authority, Pham Van Dong rejected consumer society.

Much as I feel a tension between my own aesthetic and cultural tastes and the preferences of vast numbers of people, I do not conclude, as Miss McCarthy did, that the solution lies in the political dictatorship of a small, like-minded minority. The answer to mass vulgarity is not the rule of snobbery or a forcible return to the world of straw and sandal; but it nevertheless remains a matter of sorrow to me that, with the opportunity for individual participation in the glories of our culture greater than ever before in all our history, the meretricious, the vulgar, and the downright hideous should triumph so easily, should find so eager a reception in the minds of men.

It is strange, perhaps, to speak of aesthetics in the context of an exhibition of photographs of the Vietnam War, but even when the photographs move on from the serene landscape of Indochina to the terrible events of war, it is obvious that the photographers were aesthetes of a kind. With death and terror all around them, they yet had a mind to the composition of their pictures. For their photographs were not just taken unselfconsciously but were composed, often brilliantly so. A camera pointed at random, even in the fiercest of action, would not have produced these shattering images.

How could anyone witness these scenes—of scattered corpses, of interrogation under torture by suspension of a suspect upside down, of mortally wounded men dying in the mud, even of a woman correspondent, Dickey Chapelle, being

It took 15 minutes in this position for this Viet Cong soldier to admit to being a sniper (right). Previous page: on patrol in Vietnam's Mekong Delta in 1968

SEAN FLYNN/UPI

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SEAN FLYNN/UPI

Hearing a rifle shot that his captors said had just killed his father, a Viet Cong boy cries. It was a ruse to make him talk.

given the last rites after she had stepped on a landmine and her neck had been ripped open by a piece of shrapnel, her head lying in a shining pool of her own blood—how could anyone witness them and still worry about composition? Is this not evidence of a defective sensibility, of an almost psychopathic indifference to human suffering?

No. In a small way, on a scale nothing like that in *Requiem*, I, too, have witnessed scenes of horror in far-flung places: a church in Monrovia, for example, in which 600 people taking refuge from the civil war were heartlessly slaughtered by the troops of the dictator, and where the silhouettes of the victims' bodies were still visible in the dried blood on the floor; or of the corpses of poor Peruvians in Ayacucho, murdered by the Shining Path guerrillas to discourage other Peruvians from voting as they had just done. The flesh of their faces had been flayed from their skulls, leaving their eerily translucent eyeballs naked and exposed—and I, too, took photographs, while worrying about the angle, the light, the composition.

I was consumed by the need to communicate to others what I had seen for myself, and a bad, uncomposed photograph would never be published. My aesthetic concerns, therefore, were not a sign of any lack of feeling on my part, but on the contrary, of my strength of feeling and character—that, at any rate, is what I told myself. Certainly, the desire to inform the world about suffering distances the informer emotionally from that suffering, even his own, but not in the way that a psychopathic perpetrator distances himself from his victims, and not for the same purposes. The photographer of catastrophe is more akin to the doctor, who does not suffer a moral collapse every time he encounters a tragedy:

> *The wounded surgeon plies the steel*
> *That questions the distempered part;*
> *Beneath the bleeding hands we feel*
> *The sharp compassion of the healer's art*
> *Resolving the enigma of the fever chart.*

It is only the sentimentalist who imagines that the profundity of a person's response to tragedy is

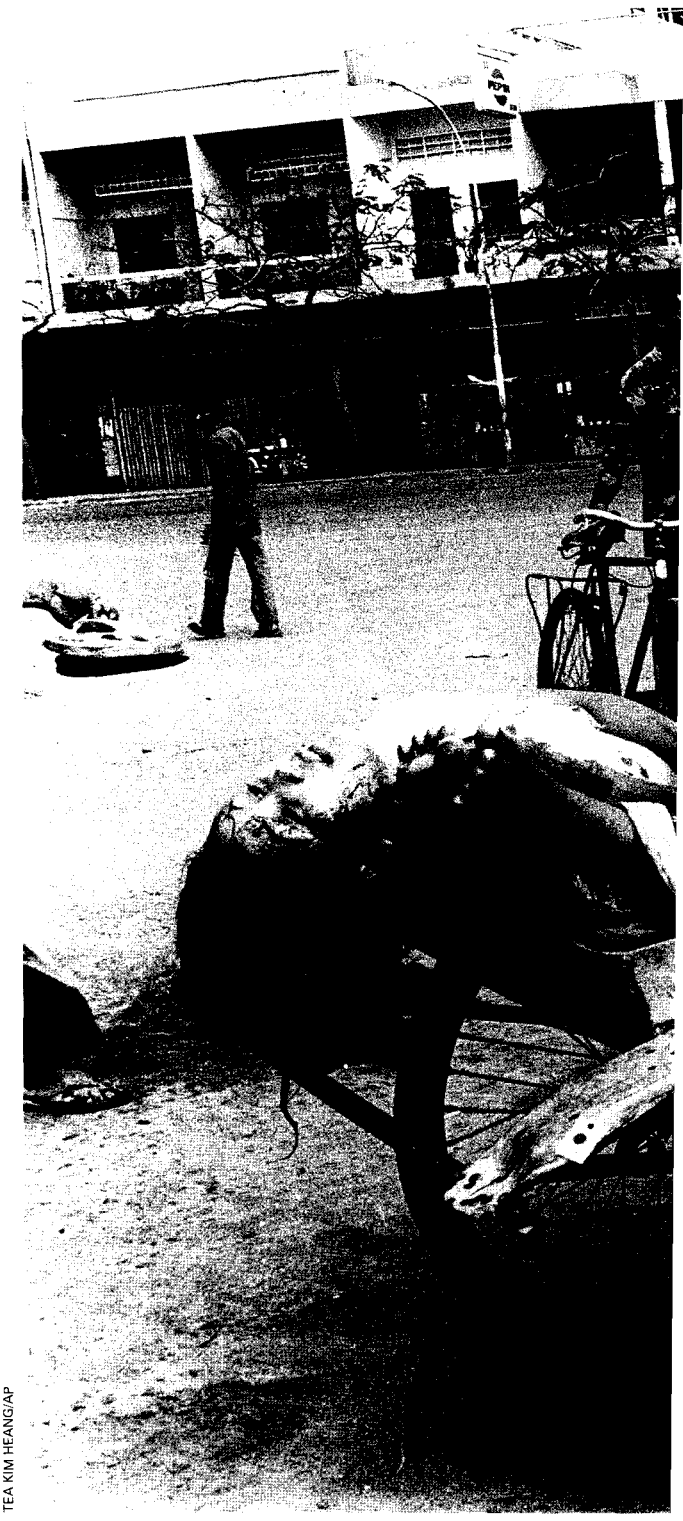
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

proportional to the length, volume, or shrillness of his lamentation.

But human motives are rarely pure and never simple. One hundred and thirty-five photographers are known to have been killed in the Vietnam War, 41 of them from countries in which they could easily have lived in peace, prosperity, and perfect honor, without having exposed themselves to the trauma or dangers of war. They knew the risks they ran (as how could they not have known?), and many of them returned for further tours of duty knowing that death was no distant possibility. But away from the war, they grew restless, bored, and dissatisfied. I do not think that a desire to inform their fellow citizens of what was happening, laudable though it was, can be the whole explanation of their extraordinary, almost suicidal, conduct.

These photographers hated the war, but they loved it too: for it gave meaning to their lives or at the very least provided a temporary relief from those nagging questions about the meaning of life that even the most complacent of us sometimes ask. Doctor Johnson kicked a stone to establish the reality, which Bishop Berkeley had questioned, of the external world; these photographers established that there was more to life than dull domestic routine by going to war. Vietnam was big enough for the largest ego to lose itself in; it was big enough to give purpose to the most aimless of lives.

I understand this frame of mind only too well: I know the incomparable attractions of danger. Of course, I have never had myself strapped to the wings of an aircraft in a combat zone, as one of the photographers represented in this exhibition did, the better to furnish idle readers back home with a startling photograph of an air raid. But for an ordinary and respectable son of the English middle classes, with a proper profession, I have put myself in the way of a few unusual situations: I have been sought by the South African secret police for having disregarded the laws of apartheid; I have seen the inside of a Balkan police station from the point of view of someone under arrest; I have been deported from Honduras to Nicaragua as a communist; I have made myself the target of Salvadoran guerril-



TEA KIM HEANG/AP

Carting away the dead after a rocket attack

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

las for having given a ride to government soldiers; I have been clandestine in East Timor; I have traveled through several civil wars. There are few exhilarations greater than being completely beyond the reach of anyone who might help you—provided of course that the dangerous situation has been freely chosen and not imposed and that there is somewhere safe to return to when the excitement has either worn off or become overwhelming. Even with these provisos, however, I am only describing what I myself have experienced: I do not prescribe what others ought to experience. And I am happy to acknowledge that, by the standards of many, my tastes are peculiar, even perverse.

Not surprisingly, I have found my frequent returns to the workaday world of mortgages, regular hours, and supermarket shopping less than wholly pleasurable. And when, having returned from a country in which half the population has been displaced and the infrastructure entirely destroyed, I hear complaints about the difficulty of finding taxis in the rain or delays in delivery of the mail, I am apt to grow disdainful. The problem with having lived too long or too frequently in dangerous situations is that one ceases to care very much about the actual content of the existence one is so anxious to preserve. Danger absolves one of the need to deal with a hundred quotidian problems or to make a thousand little choices, each one unimportant. Danger simplifies existence and therefore—again when chosen, not imposed—comes as a relief from many anxieties.

OLIVER NOONAN/AP

South Vietnamese troops patrol the rice paddies of Long An Province.

My tastes are neither as uncommon nor extreme as might at first appear. I have met many people far more avid for the thrill of danger than I. For them, danger is like a drug to which tolerance has developed, so that they require ever larger doses to experience the same effect. I remember an American photographer in San Salvador—at a time when bombs exploded daily in the city, when Uzi-wielding men of dubious appearance guarded every store, every playground, and every middle-class home, and when the final assault by the guerrillas on the mountainside was expected at any moment—who told me that he was bored by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ROBERT CAPA/MAGNUM PHOTOS

A wounded medic from Virginia cradles the head of a wounded staff sergeant from Pennsylvania (left), and (above) this view of the Red River Delta was on Robert Capa's last roll of film.

the tameness of the city, that he longed for the real action of napalm and firefights such as happened in the countryside. He was only at inner peace in the midst of bullets, he said. He loved the country, but his commitment to it was only war-deep: if peace, alas, were to break out, he would have to find another conflict to photograph.

An extreme and terminal case, no doubt, but I encounter milder forms of the malady every day. Untold numbers of my patients, with every opportunity to lead quiet, useful, and tolerably prosperous lives, choose instead the path of complication and, if not of violence and physical danger exactly, at least of drama and excitement, leading to sleepless nights and financial loss. They break up marriages, form disastrous liaisons, chase Chimeras, and behave in ways that predictably will end in disaster. Like moths to the flame, they court catastrophe. As many have told me, they prefer disaster to boredom.

Those who are not satisfied with their work, or who have no intellectual or cultural interests, and whose coarse emotions have undergone refinement neither by education nor by adherence to civilized custom, are particularly liable to seek out the compensatory complications of domestic disorder and disarray. The perpetually unemployed, for example, lead a crude and frequently violent version of the life portrayed in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. Like French aristocrats under the *ancien régime*, they are—thanks to Social Security—under no compulsion to earn a living; and with time hanging heavy on their hands, their personal relationships are their

HENRI HUET/AP

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

only diversion. These relationships are therefore both intense and shallow, for there is never any mutual interest in them deeper than the avoidance of the ever-encroaching ennui.

The pattern of human self-destruction is confined to no social class or group, however. A distinguished and in many ways admirable Russian writer of the late nineteenth century, V.G. Korolenko, once wrote that Man is born for happiness as a bird for flight: to which one is inclined to add, yes, if mice are born for heroism. It would be difficult, in fact, to summarize human nature more inaccurately. Yet social theorists often suppose that human beings have a clear idea what it is they want from life, and behave moreover as if they were rational calculating machines designed to procure it. How many people does each of us know (present company excepted) who claim to seek happiness but freely choose paths inevitably leading to misery?

The photographers represented in *Requiem* were surely both terrified and enthralled, appalled and exhilarated, exhausted and energized, by what they saw and did. Just as the man who fights iniquity is seldom wholly satisfied by its defeat (for what is there for him to do thereafter?), so the anti-war propagandist—as each of these photographers must be accounted—comes to love his ostensible enemy as himself. Like Richard III, he would lament this weak piping time of peace and hate the idle pleasures of these days. For him, peace and peace of mind not merely fail to be synonymous, but are almost antonyms.

I learned early in my life that, if people are offered the opportunity of tranquility, they often reject it and choose torment instead. My own parents chose to live in the most abject conflictual misery and created for themselves a kind of hell on a small domestic scale, as if acting in an unscripted play by Strindberg. There was no reason external to themselves why they should not have been happy; reasonably prosperous, they lived under as benign a government as they could have wished for. Though they lived together, they addressed not a single word to one another in my presence during the 18 years I spent in their house, though we ate at least one meal a day together; once, as a child, I was awakened in the night by the raised voice of my mother exclaiming to my father, "You're a wicked, wicked man." Those are the only words I ever heard pass between them. It was like a bolt of lightning on a dark night: dazzling but unilluminating. For the rest, their silences were highly nuanced, expressing resentment, aggression, injured innocence, exasperation, moral superiority, and all the other dishonest little emotions of which the human mind is capable. They continued their absurd, self-dramatizing civil war to the end of my father's life: on his deathbed, my father, by then long separated from my mother, said to me, "Tell her she can come if she wants to," to which my mother's reply was, "Tell him I'll come if he asks me." They stuck to their principles and never did meet: for what is mere death by comparison to a lifelong quarrel?

For a long time I pitied myself: had any child ever been as miserable as I? I felt the deepest, most sincere compassion for myself. Then gradually it began to dawn on me that the education I had received had liberated me from any need or excuse to repeat the sordid triviality of my parents' personal lives. One's past is not one's destiny, and it is self-serving to pretend that it is. If henceforth I were miserable, it would be my own fault: and I vowed never to waste my substance on petty domestic conflict.

It was the time of the Vietnam War. Pictures such as those displayed in *Requiem* seemed to uncritical and arrogant youth to unmask the falseness, the hypocrisy, the hidden but always underlying violence of Western civilization. It was the time of the Glaswegian psychiatrist R.D. Laing, according to whom only the insane were sane in an insane world, while the sane were truly insane. The family was the means by which society passed on and perpetuated its collective madness; and the Cambridge social anthropologist Edmund Leach famously said in a series of lectures on the BBC that the nuclear family was responsible not for some of, but for all of the misery of human existence. (Pol Pot was but a few years away.)

For obvious reasons, I was not entirely well-disposed to family life or to the supposed joys of bour-

Cambodian troops retake a temple from the Khmer Rouge in 1974.

PEN/AP

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

geois existence, and therefore swallowed some of the nonsense whole. Like the photographers, I was only too desirous of escaping what I supposed to be the source of my personal dissatisfactions. But not for very long: for I soon came to realize that the peculiarities of my personal upbringing were not a reliable prism through which to judge the world. The only thing worse than having a family, I discovered, is not having a family. My rejection of bourgeois virtues as mean-spirited and antithetical to real human development could not long survive contact with situations in which those virtues were entirely absent; and a rejection of everything associated with one's childhood is not so much an escape from that childhood as an imprisonment by it.

It was in Africa that I first discovered that the bourgeois virtues are not only desirable but often heroic. I was working in a hospital in what was then still Rhodesia and is now Zimbabwe. I was still of the callow—and fundamentally lazy—youthful opinion that nothing in the world could change until everything changed, in which case a social system would arise in which it would be no longer necessary for anyone to be good. The head nurse on the ward in which I worked, a black woman, invited me to her home in the township for a meal. At that time and in that place, social contact between blacks and whites was unusual, though not actually illegal.

She was a splendid, kindly, hardworking woman. She lived in a township in which there were thousands of tiny, identical, prefabricated bungalows, the size of huts. The level of violence in the township was very great: on Saturday night, the floors of the emergency department of my hospital were slippery with still-flowing blood.

In this unpromising environment, I discovered, the nurse had created an extremely comfortable and even pretty home for herself and her aging mother. Her tiny patch of land was like a bower; the inside of her house was immaculately clean, tidy, and well—though cheaply—furnished. I would never laugh again at the taste of people of limited means to make a comfortable home for themselves.

Henri Huet, killed in Laos in 1971, took this photo of Vietnamese children in 1966.

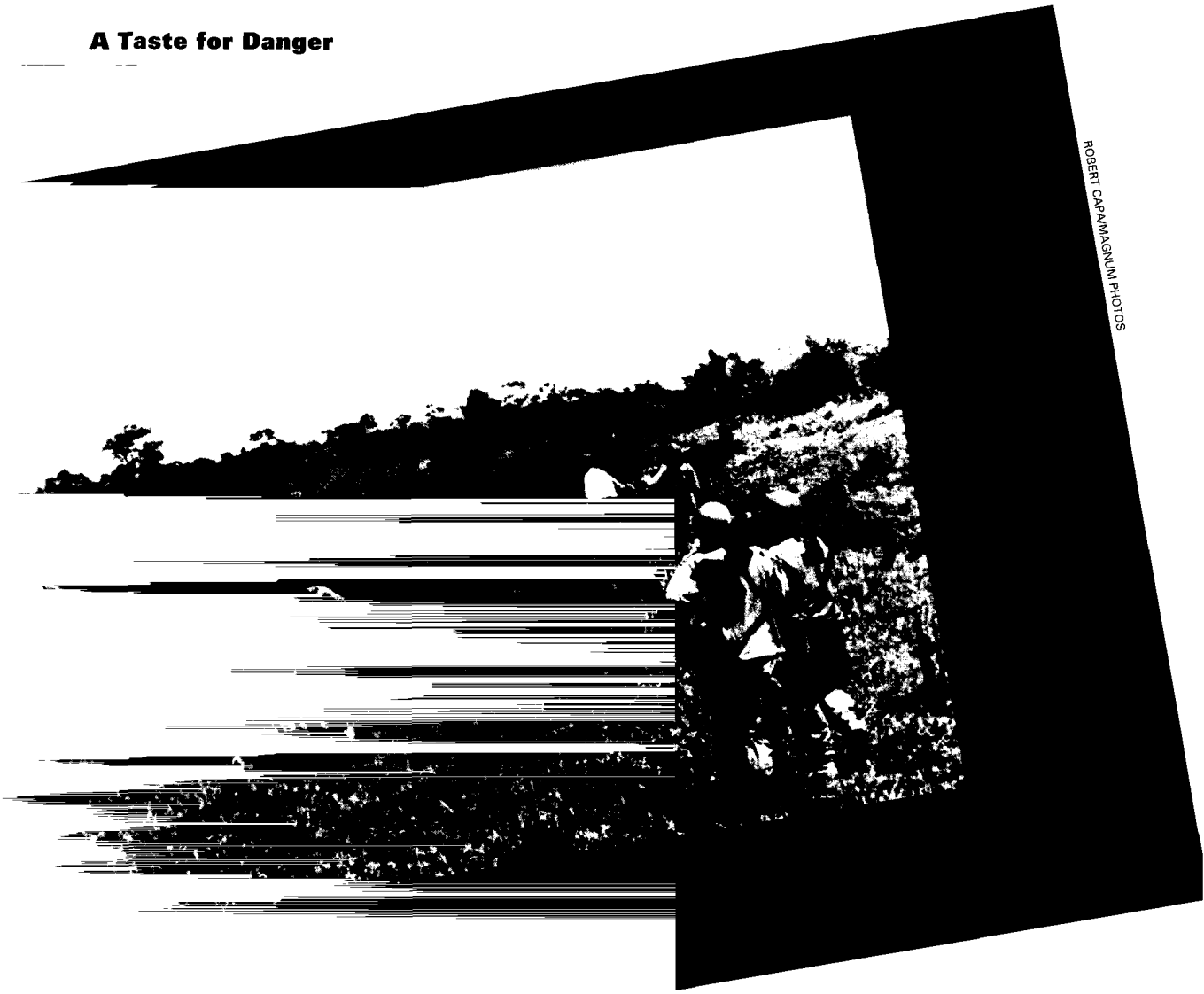
HENRI HUET/AP

Looking around me in the township, I began to see that the spotlessly clean white uniform in which she appeared every day in the hospital represented not an absurd fetish, not the brutal imposition of alien cultural standards upon African life, but a noble triumph of the human spirit—as, indeed, did her tenderly cared-for home. By comparison with her struggle to maintain herself in decency, my former rejection of bourgeois proprieties and respectability seemed to me ever afterward to be shallow, trivial, and adolescent. Until then, I had assumed, along with most of my generation unacquainted with real hardship, that a scruffy appearance was a sign of spiritual election, representing a rejection of the superficiality and materialism of bourgeois life. Ever since then, however, I have not been able to witness the voluntary adoption of torn, worn out, and tattered clothes—at least in public—by those in a position to dress otherwise without a feeling of deep disgust. Far from being a sign of solidarity with the poor, it is a perverse mockery of them; it is spitting on the graves of our ancestors, who struggled so hard, so long, and so bitterly that we might be warm, clean, well-fed, and leisured enough to enjoy the better things in life.

To base one's rejection of what exists—and hence one's prescription for a better world—upon the petty frustrations of one's youth, as surely many middle-class radicals have done, is profoundly egotistical. Unless consciously rejected, this impulse leads to a tendency throughout life to judge the rightness or wrongness of policies by one's personal emotional response to them, as if emotion were an infallible guide. *Only connect*, was E.M. Forster's enigmatic injunction to his readers at the end of *Howard's End*: to which I should prefer the injunction *Only compare*. One's supposed sufferings are then not so great after all and give no special insight into the world as it is or as it should be.

But the overestimation of the importance of one's emotional responses is very widespread. It could be seen in the comment book available to vistors to the *Requiem* exhibition. Most of the visitors who wrote more than a word or two imagined that their personal responses to the pictures were sufficient for them to pass judgment on the war itself, indeed on all war. It seemed to occur to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



ROBERT CAPA/MAGNUM PHOTOS

The last photo Robert Capa shot before he was killed in 1954.

none of them that the justness or otherwise of the war could not be judged by the pictures alone, and that they needed a lot more information to make this judgment—for if such photographs had been published of Allied soldiers and civilians during the Second World War, they might, in the absence of any other information, be taken as evidence of the wrongness of resistance to Nazism

It is not surprising that emotion untutored by thought results in nearly contentless blather, in which—ironically enough—genuine emotion itself cannot be adequately expressed.

"What hurts so much," wrote one person who had visited the exhibition, "is that we humans keep doing this war/killing thing. We must hammer our guns into Plows and STUDY Peace." There were pages and pages of this kind of sentiment, which aimed to combine thought with emotion and missed both. The comment of an Italian stood out like a beacon of truth in this murk of dishonesty: "*É molto emocionante. Se non fosse la guerra, che cosa farebbero i reporter?*"

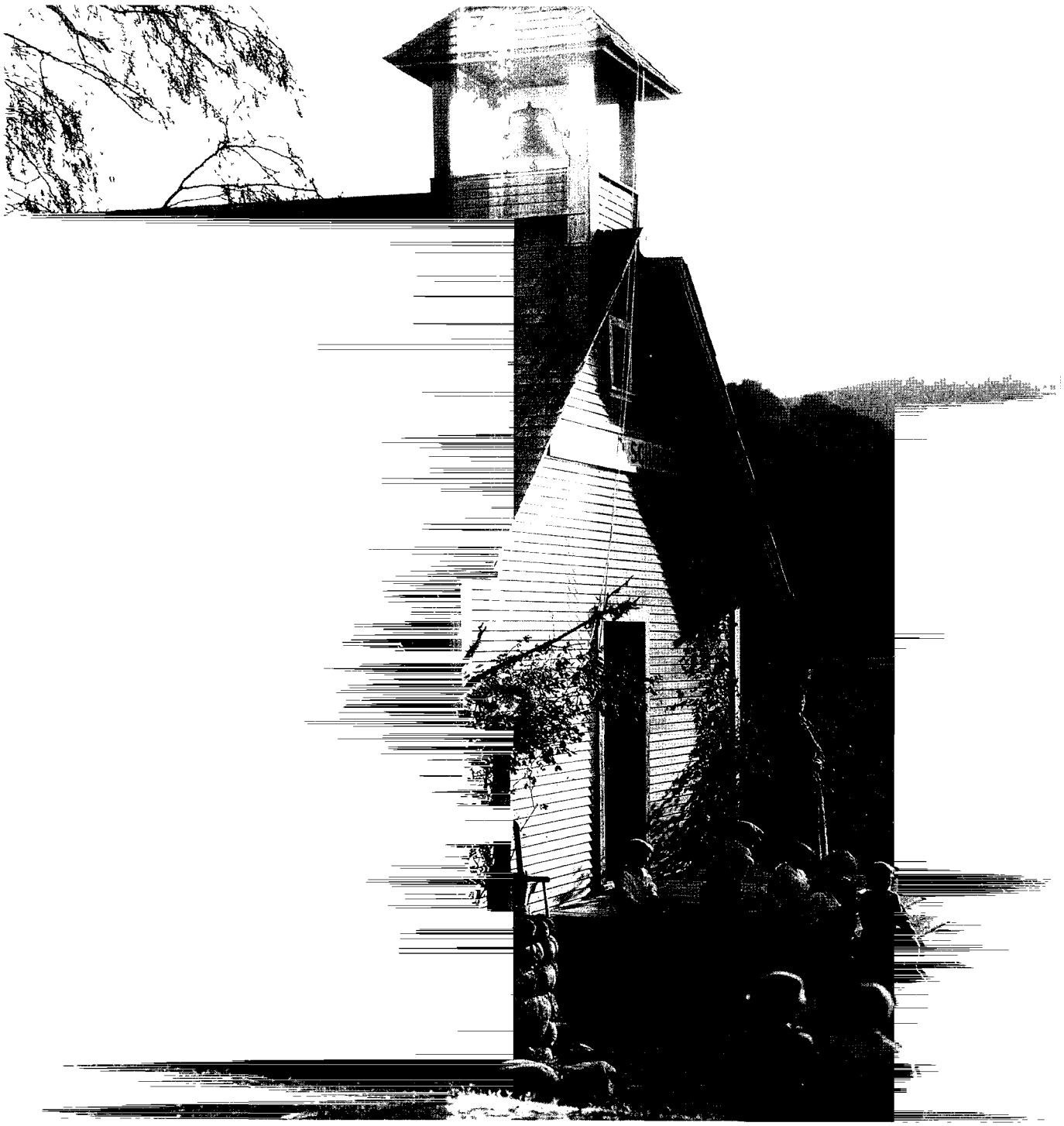
Very moving. If it weren't for war, what would journalists do? •

Correspondent Dickey Chapelle receives the last rites in 1965.

HENRI HUET/AP

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

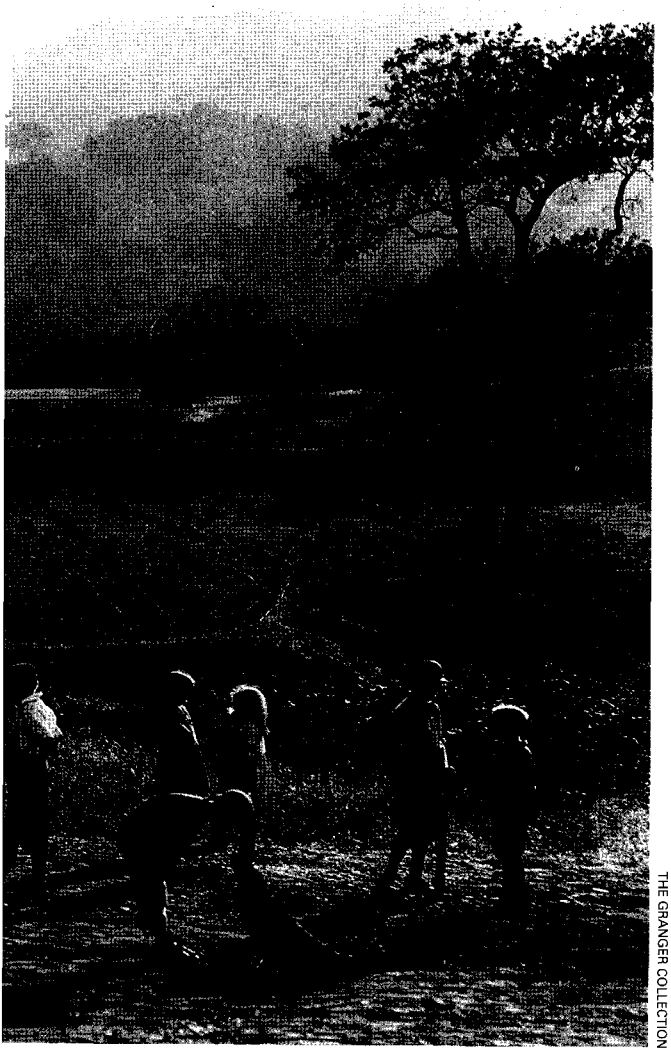
LICENSED TO VIVE CRG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



William A. Fischel

How Judges Are Making Public Schools Worse

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



THE GRANGER COLLECTION

Just last December, the Supreme Court of New Hampshire declared that the state's use of the local property tax to finance public education was unconstitutional. New Hampshire isn't unique in this respect: it is the 20th state in 27 years to have its top court junk this traditional method of school finance, only ten months after neighboring Vermont became the 19th. This growing trend would be objectionable enough because of the flimsy constitutional foundation the judges used to force such sweeping changes on the voters—even more objectionable in a state that stamps on its license plates the defiant Revolutionary War–era motto: Live Free or Die. But there's a still more troubling aspect to the trend: despite all the representations of its advocates that school-finance reform is a step forward for public education, it has, in fact, failed to improve the quality of education in any state where it has been imposed. Still worse, it appears to have dumbed down education in states with especially stringent reforms.

In the name of fairness and equality, courts across the nation have outlawed using local property taxes to pay for schools. The result: worse education for all.

I had a ringside seat to the goings-on in New Hampshire: the property tax is on my economics beat, and I had signed on with the state as an expert witness. Here's how the decision came about—and, more important, here's why it and the decisions like it are, inevitably, deeply destructive.

In 1992, a group called the Claremont Coalition had sued New Hampshire, charging that the state's method of financing its public schools was unconstitutional. Reliance on local property taxes, the suit alleged, unfairly permitted wealthier communities to have better-funded schools at a lower tax rate than poor communities. The trial judge, seeing nothing unconstitutional in this, threw out the suit, but the state supreme court reversed that decision in December 1993, holding that the coalition did indeed have a constitutional basis for proceeding. After all, the high court declared, "Part II, article 83 imposes a duty on the State to provide a constitutionally adequate education to every educable child in the public schools in New Hampshire and to guarantee adequate funding."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Article 83, known as the "cherishment of literature" clause, is, to say the least, nebulous. "Knowledge and learning, generally diffused through a community, being essential to the preservation of a free government; and spreading the opportunities and advantages of education through the various parts of the country, being highly conducive to promote this end;" it declares, "it shall be the duty of the legislators and magistrates, in all future periods of this government, to cherish the interest of literature and the sciences, and all seminaries and public schools, to encourage private and public institutions, rewards, and immunities for the promotion of agriculture, arts, sciences, commerce, trades, manufactures, and natural history of the country; to countenance and inculcate the principles of humanity and general benevolence, public and private charity, industry and economy, honesty and punctuality, sincerity, sobriety, and all social affections, and generous sentiments, among the people. . . ."

Prior to *Serrano*, most voters saw a close connection between what they paid in property taxes and the quality of their local schools.

Just how these eighteenth-century words relate to the state's use of the property tax to finance schools is a mystery that makes the Kabala seem like one of McGuffey's Readers. But on that basis, the New Hampshire Supreme Court in its 1997 decision held that the Legislature had to define and fund an "adequate" level of education for all public schools. The funds had to come from a tax whose rate could not vary from place to place; locally controlled property taxes could not be the basis for "adequate" funding. The court made it clear, moreover, that the Legislature could not evade its order by using a low number for "adequacy." For most towns, this means that nearly all school revenue will henceforth come from the state. In New Hampshire, in which nearly 90 percent of all public funding had traditionally come from local property taxes, this would be an enormous change.

If the court could deploy these eighteenth-century exhortations to require statewide taxation to fund public schools, could it also order the Legislature to set up and fund a program to "inculcate the principles of humanity and general benevolence"? It could be like one of those state-sponsored self-esteem programs that used to emanate occasionally from California. . . .

Ultimately, in fact, the *Claremont* case did emanate from the Left Coast. The judicial snowball that just flattened New Hampshire began rolling with the California Supreme Court's 1971 *Serrano* v. *Priest* decision. The California court ruled that local financing of education by the property tax was a violation of the state constitution's equal protection clause. After a subsequent trial, the court upheld in 1976 a simple remedy that the trial judge had imposed on the state: publicly funded education expenditures per student could not vary among school districts, with only the most trivial and inconsequential exceptions. As a practical matter, all public-education funds, regardless of their source, fell under state control. Educational equality had arrived with a vengeance. And vengeance is what California got.

The Legislature responded to *Serrano* with a 1977 bill that attempted to pull all districts up to the spending of education-minded places like Berkeley, if not of Beverly Hills. The bill did this first by funneling most of the state's inflation-driven budget surplus into education spending. In order to meet the court's insistence on equality, it also imposed a stiff handicap on the "property-rich" districts. Districts with large amounts of commercial and industrial property or expensive homes could lavish money on their own schools only if they shared their property tax revenues with the rest of the state. Its proponents called this idea "district power equalization." They hailed it as a way of "recapturing" concentrations of property wealth—as if the locals had stolen something from the state—and the tax base equalization idea has propelled the school-finance movement ever since.

Trouble began in California during the very summer that the new school-finance bill was in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

preparation. A persistent reformer named Howard Jarvis, previously unable to get his property-tax-limitation proposals on the California ballot, suddenly hit pay dirt. Property values were spiraling up everywhere, and legislators weren't reducing tax rates sufficiently to prevent homeowners' taxes from going through the roof. Jarvis's property-tax-limitation initiative began attracting signatures at a rate that made it certain to be on the statewide ballot in 1978.

In response, the Legislature did what it had done successfully when faced with previous initiatives like this: it began to draft a milder counterproposal for property tax relief. But this time, the legislators ran into a problem. The school-finance bill they had just passed had eaten up the funds that otherwise could have gone for tax relief. A further complication was that many of the voters who complained loudest about property tax increases lived in the property-rich communities whose supposedly excessive wealth was the *Serrano* decision's target. To use state money to lubricate these squeaky wheels would conflict with the court's decision and surrender funds that were part of the Legislature's response to it.

So Sacramento put off property tax reform until 1978. By then, it was too late. Proposition 13, as Jarvis's initiative was known, passed in June 1978 by a two-to-one margin. It cut property tax revenues by more than half. Because localities had to use most of the remaining property tax revenues to finance local government operations other than schools, the state took over financing of the schools with little contribution from property taxes. Golden State schools—once a national paragon, like the state's university system—have gone into the tank. Almost no education professional has a kind word for the chronically underfunded system, and most people blame Proposition 13.

I suspected, however, that Proposition 13 was not the root cause of the twin problems of underfunding and declining quality. Nothing prevented the state Legislature from using other taxes to "level up" school spending to its previous average, as it had just done the previous summer. I wrote two professional papers, one in 1989 and another in 1996, explaining how the *Serrano* decision caused Proposition 13 by undermining support for local education.

Prior to *Serrano*, most voters saw a close connection between what they paid in property taxes and the quality of their local schools. As the Legislature applied *Serrano*'s equalization principles with increasing rigor, however, voters watched this connection evaporate. Indeed, polls found in 1978 that even families with kids in public schools favored Proposition 13 as much as other voters did. The reason was, I believe, that *Serrano* had, as its proponents desired, severed the fiscal connection between local taxes and schools. Without the support of local voters, statewide funding has never been able to replace the lost property tax revenues. (Ohio voters' recent refusal to raise state sales taxes to fund its court-ordered reform indicates that Californians are not exceptional in this respect.) I've managed to convince the economists who have read my articles that I am right, but for such an unusual thesis, one always looks for confirmation. I found it in one of the least expected places.

Left-wing author Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* has become the emotional bible of the school-finance-reform movement. It heads the reading list of nearly every education-reform course in American universities. The book relates Kozol's cross-country visit to rich and poor schools in the late 1980s, when he discovered what Mae West told us long ago: rich is better. (This conclusion is more surprising than it sounds: most researchers have found little linkage between public school spending and academic success.)

Kozol's book is not a compliment to the successes, though. It is a 1960s-style indictment of "the system" for the failure of schools in poor areas, and Kozol advocates *Serrano*-style remedies. Kozol had formed his conclusion long before he set out, and he was careful to avoid any contrary evidence. This was his usual procedure: he had taken a similar journey to schools in Cuba during the 1970s, and his account of it, *Children of the Revolution*, offered nothing but praise for a system that he contentedly observed with Castro

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE GRANGER COLLECTION

government officials always by his side—as translators and helpmates, he explains. His inability to criticize any aspect of Castro's regime indicates that he surely didn't need them as ideological guides.

In *Savage Inequalities*, Kozol drew attention to Baldwin Park, a poor community near Los Angeles that had been the poster child of the *Serrano* litigation, which had paired it with Beverly Hills to show how unequal they were. Kozol found that Baldwin Park was still underfunded and inferior more than a decade after *Serrano*. Kozol blamed Proposition 13. But he also had an explanation for why Proposition 13 had passed. "As soon as Californians understood the implications of [the Legislature's 1977 response to *Serrano*]—namely, that funding for most of their public schools would henceforth be approximately equal—a conservative revolt surged through the state. . . . Proposition 13, as the tax cap would be known, may be interpreted in several ways. One interpretation was described succinctly by a California legislator: 'This is the revenge of wealth against the poor. *If the schools must actually be equal,* they are saying, *then we'll undercut them all.*' "

In the end, Kozol concluded, the *Serrano* plaintiffs "won the equity they sought, but it is to some extent a victory of losers." All the more reason, he contends, for undertaking even more extreme measures to equalize school spending. But less tendentious observers might consider it a reason to rethink the idea of getting courts into the school-finance business.

After all, 70 percent of the voters in poor Baldwin Park voted for Proposition 13.

Armed with my cautionary tale about the unintended effects of judicial activism, I was eager to apply my ideas to a real controversy. New Hampshire, aside from being my home state, seemed an ideal place for a tournament of ideas. Its reliance on property taxation for school funding is by far the largest of any state. It is small enough—one-thirtieth the population of California—to examine carefully, and it has none of the concentrations of minority populations that complicate the judicial issue in other states.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

New Hampshire's reliance on property tax financing of schools was already a hotly contested political issue when the litigation began. In 1992, the Democratic candidate for governor had adopted as her platform a new state income tax—New Hampshire has no broad-based taxes—designed to replace local school taxes. The lawyer representing the Claremont Coalition in court at the time actively campaigned for her because, as he said on TV, her platform would go a long way toward meeting the goal of his suit. But the well-funded candidate lost, and a study I did with another Dartmouth economist, Colin Campbell, concluded that her defeat came about because of the voters' aversion to her fiscal program. We also found no basis for the notion—propounded by, among others, academic lawyers in the 1991 *Harvard Law Review*—that states like New Hampshire needed court intervention to overcome legislative inertia and bring about tax reform that voters favored.

The gap in SAT scores between kids from rich and poor backgrounds has not narrowed at all in states that have made spending more equalized.

On the contrary: the would-be governor had taken her program straight to the voters, they understood her message, and they emphatically said no.

My problem as an expert witness for the New Hampshire litigation was that I had only one story—California's—about the dire effects of court-ordered centralization of school finance. So I made a deal with the state's attorney, whom I had contacted about the New Hampshire case. I would work as a consultant for a bargain rate, if she would cover my expenses for producing a research paper on the school-finance issue. That would allow me to determine (and give evidence about) whether what I had discovered in California—that a switch from local property taxes to uniform statewide funding caused schools to decline—applied in other states.

I found out that it did—and, somewhat to my surprise, I found out why. The school-finance-reform movement has been around long enough, and has spread to enough states, to allow economists to gather statistical evidence on its effects. True, the constitutional basis for these decisions varies from state to state, but that hardly matters, for even legal scholars sympathetic to the movement—as most are—note that there is at best a tenuous connection between any particular constitutional provision and the judges' decisions in these cases. Nor does it matter that litigation has switched from the "equality" standard of California to the "adequacy" standard the New Hampshire court adopted. The upshot of all the cases is a reduction in reliance on local property taxes, an increase in reliance on state taxes, and a reduction in the differences in spending among districts.

And what is the result? Like California, several other states with *Serrano*-style decisions have experienced substantial declines in spending per pupil relative to the national average—though California, with one-seventh of the nation's children, is the most extreme example of decline. (The fact that in the last two decades U.S. spending per pupil has risen 70 percent faster than the rate of inflation often camouflages relative drops in school spending; the notion that as a nation we are starving our schools is nonsense.) But some states are exceptions: in New Jersey, for example, school spending has continued to rise since its court got into the act. (Significantly, though, the Garden State has never fully complied with its court's order, and the court approved a compromise in May 1998, 27 years after the first ruling in a case that even the court conceded has a "long and tortuous history.")

Although there is legitimate academic dispute about exactly how much spending these suits have engendered, it is clear to all that the widely held belief that centralization of school funding will necessarily increase average spending is wrong. Leveling down is the more likely outcome of legislation that slavishly complies with court-ordered centralization. Berkeley's Charles Benson, the late dean of American education finance and an advocate for the *Serrano* litigation, confessed at a congressional hearing on school-finance issues a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

few years ago, "You must be very careful when you wish for things, because you may just get what you wish for. We worked hard for equity in California. We got it. Now we don't like it."

Spending, however, is not the main issue. It is educational quality, and about that there is more unambiguous evidence. Is there any quantifiable evidence, or any evidence at all, that the average quality of education in any state has risen as a result of court-ordered school-finance reform? No. Is there any evidence that the gap in test scores between rich and poor districts has narrowed as a result of the litigation? Again, no.

The absence of evidence of academic success is worrisome enough, but more alarming is the evidence of decline. Several studies by reputable economists have examined SAT scores by state. SAT scores were once considered unreliable indicators of the performance of state school systems, because they were not a random sample. In some states, only a few seniors who are going out of state to selective colleges take the test. Because such students are usually better than average, states with low participation rates thus had higher scores. But in the last few years, economists have used statistical techniques to control for participation rates as well as demographic and economic differences among the states. They find that state SAT score rankings, adjusted for participation rates, are actually reasonable indicators of how much students have learned in the state's schools. (New Hampshire is consistently near the top in these rankings, which should be a clue that near-total reliance on local property taxes promotes high-quality education.)

With this advance in technique, it was now possible to discern something about the trend in SAT scores. The findings should have given pause to the school-finance-reform movement. Reductions in reliance on local property taxation, especially if caused by court orders of the type issued in *Serrano* in California, seem to cause *declines* in average SAT scores. Nor is there evidence that finance equalization promotes equality of opportunity. The gap in SAT scores between kids from rich and poor backgrounds has not narrowed at all in states that have made spending more equalized.

I don't want to put too much credence in these studies. The samples are limited, the states are diverse, and family background is always more important than how schools are financed. But consider the public stakes. Suppose someone marketed a pill that promised that poor kids would get smarter and rich kids would at least not get dumber, so that average intelligence would increase. The pill is hyped so much that courts start to order that it be dropped in municipal water supplies; to withhold it would be a crime. But when the studies come in, the pill does not meet the FDA's test for being safe and effective. And with some alarming studies showing that the pill has exactly the opposite effects, one could imagine the Centers for Disease Control ordering a recall.

The dismaying test-score results make more sense if one understands just how the school-finance pill undermines the education system. Simply put, school-finance reform breaks down local fiscal control, a crucial political force, however reformers deride it. The genius of local property tax financing for schools is that it gives everyone in the community—not just those with kids in the public schools—an incentive to favor efficiently run, high-quality schools. The reason is as follows. Most voters own their own homes, which are their largest asset. Study after study has shown that a good school raises all home values in the community, giving every homeowner an incentive to favor good schools. It is equally well established that high property taxes reduce home values. Therefore, every homeowner has an incentive to keep taxes from rising unless the benefits of the expenditure offset the tax costs.

Local financing thus gives voters a double-barreled incentive to examine closely proposals by school administrators to raise local taxes for new school initiatives. Faced with a budget that rewards good teachers and one of the same cost that featherbeds the school administration, voters have an incentive to accept the first and reject the second. Voters' home values have a chance of going up in the first scenario; they will undoubtedly go down in the second.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

These key political incentives are lost when the state controls school financing. A rise or fall in spending at the state level will have only the smallest effect on individual homes, and so voters without school-age children will have little reason to pay attention to education issues. Instead of being a balance of benefits and costs, for most childless voters education becomes just another tax burden. Of course, at the state level, teachers' unions are more influential, so spending on schools may go up in some cases. But sophisticated research has shown that spending decisions controlled by such interests do little to improve the quality of education.

Many advocates of court-ordered reform say that their goal is not to have the state do the funding. They argue that the property tax is acceptable as long as a common tax rate doesn't produce disparities in per-pupil spending from district to district. Rates can vary among districts, but only as long as each rate raises the same amount per pupil. This idea, also known as district power equalization, was advanced by Berkeley law professor Jack Coons and two co-authors in 1970. It influenced the *Serrano* court and many subsequent decisions in other states.

Vermont recently implemented this idea as a result of its widely publicized *Serrano*-style decision. Now, property-rich districts, such as Stowe and other ski-resort towns, will have to increase their property taxes by more than 40 percent just to maintain their current school spending. These "gold towns," as proponents of the litigation called them, are supposed to pass this extra tax revenue on to towns with less taxable property. The evidence so far suggests, however, that the likely result is that the "gold towns" will cut their education spending and let their school systems decline. (Apparently, Vermont schools no longer teach the fable of the goose and golden eggs.)

ARTHUR ROTHSTEIN/THE GRANGER COLLECTION

Aside from its devastating effect on the towns subject to having their tax base "recaptured," district power equalization eliminates much of the fiscal incentive that any local district has to improve educational quality. If a district taxes itself more and its schools get better, local property values will increase. Then the Coons "wealth neutrality" formula will kick in, requiring that state aid be reduced, if it was a receiving district, or that the local tax rate be increased further if its

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

property base was large to begin with. The incentives are like the worst aspects of the old welfare system: if a welfare family's head got a job, the family would lose all its benefits and often be no better off than before.

The Coons formula is perverse in another way. Its characterization of districts with a large tax base as being "rich" is wrong in two respects. Many property-rich places are filled with poor people, and tax-base sharing proposals would harm those peo-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ple by both raising local property taxes and cutting school spending. In California, a majority of children in poor families live in districts with above-average tax bases, largely because Los Angeles and San Francisco have slightly higher-than-average property values per pupil than other places in California. On the other side, many suburbs use strict zoning laws to keep industry out, to maintain the pristine quality of their neighborhoods. Nothing wrong with that, but it should hardly entitle them to be on the receiving end of tax-base sharing.

The other error of characterizing property-rich places as rich is that people who bought homes in such places had to pay in advance for the fiscal benefits they get. I have lots of statistical evidence for this, but most people find the following concrete example more convincing.

At the local level, voters can resist union featherbedding and excessive salary demands by rejecting school budgets.

In my local research in the New Hampshire case, I found instances in which a developer had built nearly identical houses on two sides of a town border. The two towns had different tax bases: one had a power-generating plant, and the other did not. The towns shared a high school, each paying only for the students it sent there. Real estate records showed that the houses in the property-rich town sold for a higher price than nearly identical houses in the other town, less than a mile away. The people who bought the house in the property-rich town did indeed pay less in school taxes, but their annual mortgage payments, as I calculated them, almost exactly offset the tax advantage. The fiscal advantage of living in the property-rich community had been eliminated by the housing market.

Economists have known for almost three decades that the benefits and costs of school taxes are reflected in home values—the name for the result is "capitalization." A precondition for capitalization is that homebuyers have a choice of communities into which they move when they take new jobs, get married, or upgrade their homes. Economists regard the process of voting by moving van as no less important for an efficient system of public services than voting in local elections. The threat of exit (and the unwillingness to enter) has always been a protection against governmental abuse. But not until the last few years has this idea, which started with the work of economists Charles Tiebout and Wallace Oates, been applied rigorously to the issue of local education.

The undisputed star of this enterprise is a young Harvard economist named Caroline Hoxby. Her research has gone beyond the evidence about capitalization to show that competition among public schools (and with nearby private schools) measurably improves the quality of education for all students. In areas with many independent school districts, which allow potential residents to shop for schools when they shop for homes, the quality of education is clearly better. Hoxby's prodigious sets of data and state-of-the-art econometrics have shown that property tax funding by local school districts is the most effective way to obtain high-quality public education at reasonable cost. Her research confirms the May 15, 1996, story in *USA Today*: under the headline HOME BUYERS GO SHOPPING FOR SCHOOLS, the paper reported that "childless house hunters are increasingly asking for houses in quality school districts." Hoxby and others have shown that competition among communities to attract such buyers works to provide good public schools nearly as effectively as it works among providers of ordinary goods. The fiscal race is to the top, not, as is commonly alleged, to the bottom, when local school quality is the prize.

I introduced the New Hampshire attorney in charge of defending the *Claremont* case to Hoxby in the hope that she would hire her as an expert, too. She did, and Hoxby testified so effectively at the trial that the *Concord Monitor*, a local newspaper that favored the plaintiffs, wrote a special editorial attacking her as the carpetbagger from

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Harvard. My testimony the next day seconded Hoxby's, but as a homeboy I was exempt from the carpetbagger charge, and I was disappointed not to get any editorial notice.

The state won at trial; the reversal came on appeal. I had a hint that things would not go well. During the state's oral argument before the New Hampshire Supreme Court, one of the judges wondered aloud why the trial judge had paid so much attention to the experts. And who is to gainsay him? Why pay attention to the experts when your authority to guide schools into the twenty-first century comes from an eighteenth-century admonition to "cherish the interest of literature and the sciences, and all seminaries and public schools"?

Of course, the actual constitutional language makes no difference in these cases, and fair-minded studies of state constitutional history reveal no basis for such decisions, either. They are purely political, and it is important to understand how the courts wandered into this labyrinth. One impetus is the enduring influence of *Brown* v. *Board of Education*. Many lawyers regard *Serrano* and its progeny as extensions of the special place that *Brown* gave to schools. It is perhaps this idea that has drawn such moderate and thoughtful scholars as Jack Coons into this endeavor. The courts fixed segregated schools, goes this story, so they should be able to fix the unequal financing of education. And, in fact, the U.S. Supreme Court avoided embedding school finance in the U.S. Constitution by only a single vote in 1973.

Yet the *Brown* analogy does not come close to fitting the facts. The plaintiffs in New Hampshire's *Claremont* litigation were as white as the rest of the state; they are not a "discrete and insular minority"—the test for judicial intervention in *Brown*—in any sense. The citizens of property-poor towns are as well represented as (and more numerous than) those who live in property-rich places. Contrary to media-generated impressions that he was a poor Chicano, California's John Serrano was a middle-class social worker whose son's public education was going just fine, thank you. In any event, the plaintiffs are irrelevant in these cases: the suits are part of an ideological agenda, and financing for the early ones came not from local school districts but from such left-leaning foundations as Ford and Carnegie. (Attorneys who brought the later cases may serenely have kept in mind that the California Supreme Court ordered the taxpayers to pay the *Serrano* plaintiffs' legal fees, reviving the tradition of requiring the condemned man to pay his executioner.)

While the *Brown* tradition may have inspired the lawyers who take these cases, it does not explain why they so often prevail. Lots of liberal-minded litigation goes nowhere. A more likely cause of the success of school-finance litigation is the disdain that intellectuals feel for local government—only the people love local government and local schools. To left-wing intellectuals, local government is a refuge for the privileged. Former labor secretary Robert Reich epitomizes this attitude with his criticism of the suburbs as enabling "the secession of the successful." The state and national governments embrace more territory, which makes it more difficult to escape the Robin Hood taxation that Jonathan Kozol and Reich frankly advocate.

Intellectuals on the right fault local schools because they are publicly run. The term "public school monopoly" trips off the lips of conservative libertarians, despite the fact that in most metropolitan areas there are scores of different school systems. For much of the right, vouchers are the only reform worth considering. I would agree with this for big-city systems such as New York and Chicago, in which the school bureaucracy has become unaccountable to the voters, but for the majority of American families, who live outside big cities, public-school competition is a reality wherever schools are allowed to be locally financed.

The more active political forces behind the school-finance cases are the teachers' unions. The National Education Association is the nation's most powerful union. It has consistently favored the *Serrano*-style suits. The rewards are clear. At the local level, voters can resist union featherbed-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ding and excessive salary demands by rejecting school budgets. At the state level, voters and parents have far weaker incentives, since state spending does not affect their property values, and access to state legislatures is more complicated than showing up at your local school board. The enhanced influence of unions that follows from *Serrano*-style victories may sometimes result in bigger school budgets, but, as Caroline Hoxby has shown, it does not produce more effective schools.

The other critical element in brewing the school-finance disaster is the nature of the courts themselves. American courts are accustomed to common-law decision methods. They look for guidance to other courts in their own state and, in the common-law tradition, in other states as well. When an important court like California's engages in creative constitutional interpretation and wins kudos for it from the legal academy, other courts are inclined to do the same. In New Hampshire, the Supreme Court mentioned that the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court had recently issued a *Serrano*-like decision, and the New Hampshire Constitution was originally patterned closely on that of Massachusetts. In a judicial culture in which precedent is the guiding principle, imitation is regarded as a virtue.

The notion that courts should use their constitutional authority to restructure educational financing is a destructive conceit.

Unfortunately, courts are not well suited to correct their mistakes. Judicial authority for intervening in school finance is supposedly derived from constitutional principles—principles that should not be cut to fit passing fashions. So while the present California Supreme Court might decline to entertain the *Serrano* claims were it a new case, the justices can't simply reverse their decision. They would undermine their authority in other constitutional cases.

A final rationale for court intervention is to give the legislature a helping hand. The judges watch the legislators flail around with reform, never quite able to pass it, even though it seems to be a popular idea among the elites they associate with. So they decide to give the legislators some courage, or at least an excuse to override the opposition of potentially irate voters—never mind that such opposition is part of democratic processes. This was surely the case in Vermont, whose Supreme Court issued its *Serrano*-style decision just months after Democrats had swept into the Legislature promising property tax reform for schools.

Separation of powers aside, what is the matter with this? I tell the story of a father who tired of watching his daughter's unavailing attempts to learn to ride a bicycle. She always swerved from one side of the driveway to the other and fell off. So he decided to help her by welding the front wheel to the frame so it always rolled forward. Once she got the hang of balancing the bike, he reasoned, he could remove the weld to allow her to steer. But she never could balance the rigid bike, and you couldn't, either. Many people do not realize that the way they balance on a bike is by subtly steering the front wheel to avoid falling. That is why a unicycle is so much harder to ride.

By constitutionalizing school-finance issues, state courts have welded the front wheel of the school-finance bicycle to the constitution. Some reform is often justified. Low-income communities could use state aid, and the aid least likely to disrupt the subtle virtues of local control would be based on personal income, not property values. Legislatures can discover this by trial and error, just as most people learn to balance and steer a bicycle. But they cannot do this if the courts attempt to lock their reforms forever in a particular direction.

The notion that courts should use their constitutional authority to restructure educational financing is among the most destructive conceits they have indulged in in the last quarter century. It is time they stopped. •

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Reflections on the Changing *Times*

The New York Times.
LATE CITY EDITION
KENNEDY'S DRIVE SPEEDED BY WEST VIRGINIA VICTORY; HE PICKS UP BACKING HERE
KHRUSHCHEV COOLS TO PRESIDENT, DOUBTS WELCOME ON SOVIET VISIT; EISENHOWER DEFENDS ESPIONAGE
J. D. ROCKEFELLER JR. DEAD AT AGE OF 86
Kennedy's Victory Edge Over Humphrey Is 3 to 2
Atom Weapons Excluded From New U.S. Test Plan
2 RUSSIANS OUSTED BY SWISS AS SPIES
JOBS AND OUTPUT MAKE SHARP GAIN
PLAN BODY DELAYS ZONING PROPOSAL
Items Soviet Union May Use as Evidence Against U. S. Pilot Are
THE NEW YORK TIMES. REPRINTED BY PERMISSION
The New York Times
Arts & Leisure
Sunday, June 14, 1998
Section 2
In Corning (where else?), innovators have recaptured the aura of glass.
By Herbert Muschamp 34
Early music becomes controversial again: Performer 'absence.' By Richard Tarruskin. 28
Musical anthropology. By Marc Perlman.
Pianistic variety. By Malcolm Bilson.
Bilson's Beethoven. 29
Rock Kings, Drag Queens: A Common Strut
Judy Garland As a Force Of Nature
A Musician's Parallel Passion

Then and now

Hilton Kramer

How a once great journalistic enterprise became hip and trashy.

Emerson, in the chapter he devoted to the *Times* of London in *English Traits* (1856), gave us a fair preview of the place that the *New York Times* would come to occupy a century later in the lives of the educated classes in New York and the political establishment in Washington. "What you read in the morning in that journal," Emerson wrote, "you shall hear in the evening in all society." That was certainly true of the *New York Times* when I became a regular reader in the 1950s. What the *Times* reported in its daily morning editions was widely believed by that class of readers to constitute the most important news of the day. Dwight Macdonald's quip—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that the *New York Times* played a role for his generation similar to that of Aristotle in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas: its principal point of contact with the real world—may have been an amusing exaggeration, but it pointed to a fundamental truth.

To what extent this may still be true today, no one—including the top brass at the *Times*—can say with any certainty. While the *Times* continues to enjoy the favor of this class of readers, and the class itself is now greatly expanded, the paper no longer defines the news for such readers in the way it once did. Nowadays the news stories that we read in the *Times* in the morning are more likely to be an amplification, amendment, or interpretation of news we have already heard on radio or television or encountered on the Internet. While this may not diminish our interest in reading the *Times*, it does alter the basis of the paper's appeal, for it places a greater burden on the *Times*'s ability to go beyond the headlines to provide a more comprehensive account of what the news means than is readily available elsewhere. It also shifts the weight of the paper's coverage from news reporting to features about the news—indeed, to features that may serve as substitutes for news.

Everything from drug preferences to sexual "orientation" was seen to be on offer for your unconditioned choice at the lifestyle bazaar.

The downside of this need to explain and supplement the news is that it has had the inevitable effect of eradicating the distinction—once a hallmark of the *Times*—between news and opinion. Much that now passes for news analysis in the *Times* is little more than improvised punditry masquerading as disinterested information, and much that passes for hard-news reporting is itself determined by received liberal opinion. What has changed is what the *Times*—and, alas, "all society"—now regards as "All the News That's Fit to Print."

It is not only that many things hitherto scorned by the *Times* as inappropriate to its journalistic mission are now an accepted staple of its news coverage and opinion pages—most conspicuously, of course, the reportage and commentary devoted to sex, morals, and "lifestyle," and the kind of gossip, glamour, and scandal they engender. What has come to be called "lifestyle"—a word that in 1969 had not yet entered *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*—has inexorably achieved parity, and sometimes more than parity, with the gravest issues of politics and public policy as subjects for Page One attention. Inside the paper, major new features—and, in fact, whole new sections—have had to be introduced to accommodate this remarkable shift in what is thought to constitute the news of the day. The entire social and moral compass of the paper has been altered to conform to a liberal ethos that no longer draws a line between the personal and the political or—what sometimes amounts to the same thing—between media-induced notoriety and significant issues of public life.

The question to be asked about this debasement of the news is not whether the *Times* is now more liberal or less liberal than it was in the past. The *Times* has always been a liberal paper, and it remains a liberal paper today. What has changed is the nature and direction of the liberal ethos itself. In an era in which liberal ideology was primarily concerned with foreign policy, party politics, the labor movement, and an assortment of other putatively "progressive" interests and impulses, the *Times* largely concentrated its formidable journalistic resources on developments in those areas. Great journalistic careers were made at the *Times* by reporters who covered wars and revolutions, political campaigns and union strikes, and the power struggles at home and abroad that determined the fate of multitudes. Alongside the coverage of these world-shaking events there had always been a variety of "soft" features—about food, fashion, society, and the arts—but such features, while commanding a loyal readership (especially among women), remained entirely ancillary to the way the *Times*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

defined its journalistic mission and allocated its principal resources. It was an era in which real journalists didn't write about quiche.

All this was bound to change when, under the impact of the counterculture in the late 1960s and early 1970s, advanced liberal thought became fixated on the politics of personal emancipation, which made the personal political with a vengeance. The impact of the counterculture on American journalism took many forms, of course. The most obvious, which we owe largely to the disastrous conduct of the war in Vietnam by two Democratic and then one Republican administration, was the adoption by the mainstream liberal media of the kind of paranoid critique of American society and its political institutions formerly confined to the radical Left. Yet of no less importance in altering the ethos of liberal journalism was the counterculture's radical assault on middle-class manners and morals. The mainstream liberal media quickly embraced the momentous changes in manners and morals that followed in the wake of this assault as a new social orthodoxy—virtually, indeed, a new social contract. It was suddenly permissible, for example, to question the moral legitimacy of such institutions as marriage and the family, while at the same time softening, if not entirely abandoning, traditional attitudes toward non-marital sexual alliances of every variety. It wasn't long before the new code of manners and morals that governed so much of the counterculture's "underground" or "alternative" press, shaping its emancipated rhetoric and its cavalier attitude toward verifiable fact, won eager advocates in the mainstream press as well.

This speedy absorption by the mainstream press of the counterculture's "new" journalism was due in part to the remarkable influence of the radical children of the liberal middle class, from which the counterculture was largely drawn, on their parents' generation. The impact was especially great on all matters pertaining to "lifestyle," a term that can be seen in retrospect to have come into play for the specific purpose of removing notions of the good life from the realm of religion and morals to that of the politics of taste and "preference"—another word that proved useful in the counterculture's effort to eliminate traditional moral distinctions from decisions about the conduct of life. Everything—from drug preferences to sexual "orientation," from furniture to fidelity—was seen to be on offer for your unconditioned choice at the lifestyle bazaar, where new identities were now as obtainable as the latest fashions in denim.

Changes in middle-class manners and morals inevitably produce significant alterations in culture and consumption—in the clothes people wear, the hairstyles they affect, the foods they eat (or do not eat), the entertainments they favor, the music they dance to, the language they feel free to use, and the way they provide (or fail to provide) for their loved ones. It was precisely changes of this sort that prompted Joseph Epstein to observe in the mid-1970s—in an essay called "Boutique America!"—that "the most important influence of that assemblage of 1960s youth and its camp followers was not on politics, or philosophy, or art, or social organization, but on retailing." After all, he wrote, this was "the generation whose chief literary work (a National Book Award winner) has been *The Whole Earth Catalog*." (You don't have to agree about every item on Epstein's list to see that he underscored an historical development that more narrowly focused political writers had largely overlooked.) If the initial pressure for change came from disaffected middle-class youth, it was soon ratified by their liberal parents, who, having granted their adolescent offspring an unprecedented degree of moral license, hastened to appropriate for themselves the freedoms and fashions their children now enjoyed. Never before in history, perhaps, was it so much the case that the child had become father to the man.

All this was to have an immense effect on the way liberal institutions—the universities, the foundations, governmental agencies, and, of course, the media—now felt obliged to reorder their priorities. It was certainly to have an immense effect on the *New York Times*, which, beginning in the mid-1970s, was drastically reorganized to minister to the tastes and preferences of the generation—and the market—so decisively shaped by the culture and politics of the counterculture. In this sense is the *Times* as we know it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

today largely a product, if not a casualty, of the cultural revolution of the 1960s.

Changes in the paper did not occur all at once, of course. I joined the *Times*'s cultural news staff as its art news editor in the fall of 1965—on the eve of the storm that was about to engulf the paper and its readers. A dress code was still in force in the newsroom. Men had to wear ties and jackets, and women couldn't wear "trousers." When a colleague who covered the television industry was bluntly told by his editor that "reporters for the *New York Times* do not wear suede shoes," he believed his career at the paper to be over and left shortly thereafter for a job at the *Los Angeles Times*, where, presumably, a more advanced policy on footwear prevailed. Within a year or two, however, it was a common sight in the newsroom to see reporters who were covering antiwar street demonstrations attired in jeans, sweatshirts, and sneakers—the dress code of the sixties revolution having superseded that of the *Times*.

On the day it was announced in the *Times* newsroom that Ada Louise Huxtable had won the Pulitzer Prize, John Canaday went berserk.

Yet from the perspective of more recent developments, it is important to note that in 1965, far from envisioning a dumbing down of the paper's news coverage, the editors of the *Times* had lately embarked upon a comprehensive program to raise the intellectual level of its arts criticism and cultural news reporting.

Traditionally, the *Times* had been notoriously philistine in its coverage of culture and the arts. Orville Prescott on books, Bosley Crowther on movies, John Canaday on art: when I joined the *Times* in 1965, these and other benighted critics still constituted a kind of Maginot Line of resistance to modernist innovation and intellectual seriousness. For a variety of reasons—the emergence in the early 1960s of the *New York Review of Books* as an influential critical voice was certainly one of them, and another was a belated recognition that New York had become both the art capital and the dance capital of the Western world—this entrenched philistinism was no longer deemed adequate to the new situation in which the paper found itself in the mid-1960s. More and more people in more parts of the country were more interested in the arts than ever before, and the old philistine responses would no longer do for them. As the *Times*'s then executive editor, Turner Catledge, said to me when I was hired: "As far as the arts are concerned, our readers have gotten to be too smart for the kind of stuff we've been giving them."

The *Times* was by no means alone in attempting to deal with this altered situation. It was the same concern to keep abreast of new thinking in the arts that soon brought Harold Rosenberg to *The New Yorker* to write about art and Robert Hughes to *Time* magazine in the same capacity. A smug, insouciant dismissal of every new development—whether it was Minimalist sculpture, Absurdist theater, or a Hollywood movie like *Bonnie and Clyde*—was becoming a journalistic embarrassment. The search was thus on for a cadre of more sophisticated critics.

But where was the paper to find them? In the past, the *Times* had made it a practice to appoint its critics from the ranks of its own reporters. Always a bad idea, this sometimes produced really ludicrous results—a famous music critic, for example, who was said not to be able to read a note of music. Yet it had come to be assumed in the newspaper world that it was a virtue in a critic to have no more specialized knowledge of his field than most members of the audience. When, at last, the editors woke up to the realization that it might be a plus for an arts critic to know at least as much about his subject as, say, a sportswriter or an economics correspondent, it became necessary to look outside the *Times* for new talent.

Ada Louise Huxtable, who had begun her career in the department of architecture and design under Philip Johnson at the Museum of Modern Art—and whose criticism I had published in *Arts*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Magazine when I was an editor there in the 1950s—was the first of the new critics hired. It was a significant appointment, because the *Times* had never before employed a full-time architectural critic: traditionally, architecture had been relegated to the real estate news beat. Next came Clive Barnes, an English writer on dance, then little known outside of dance circles in this country. Lincoln Kirstein and Edwin Denby had enthusiastically recommended him to the *Times*. When I arrived for my first interview with Clifton Daniel, the *Times*'s managing editor, almost the first thing he announced to me was that the paper had just hired Clive as its new ballet critic. As I was an avid follower of Clive's dance columns in the London *Spectator*, I took this to be a good sign, and so, clearly, did Daniel—about me, that is, because I knew who Clive was. I soon learned, too, that Kenneth Tynan, then the most celebrated theater critic in London, had just turned down an invitation to be the *Times*'s chief drama critic, at that time considered the paper's most important critical post. (Tynan instead arranged to write a series of longer theater articles for *The New Yorker*.)

Exactly who recommended me I was never able to discover. During my first year on the paper, dozens of people—at the *Times* and in the art world—came forward to claim credit. What I did discover after I joined the paper was that John Canaday had vehemently opposed my appointment. John had thoughtfully left a copy of his hostile memorandum to Clifton Daniel prominently displayed in the art department's files, where I would be sure to find it soon after my arrival.

That, too, was a sign—but of another kind. For it was naturally a matter of fierce resentment on the part of the sitting critics at the *Times* that so many newcomers—most of whom they had never read or even heard of—were being brought in to improve the paper's coverage. Only once did this simmering hostility explode into an ugly confrontation. That was in the spring of 1970. On the day it was announced in the *Times* newsroom that Ada Louise Huxtable had won the Pulitzer Prize for criticism—it was the first year the Pulitzer committee made such an award—John Canaday went berserk. He marched into Ada Louise's

Sarris: Fouling Wilt the Stilt – p. 11
the village VOICE
20c
THE WEEKLY NEWSPAPER OF NEW YORK
Weekend in Washington
Twilight of Demonstrations, Dawn of the General Strike?
Father Dan Berrigan: Fugitive from Injustice
God, Nixon, and Norman Vincent Peale
The Unladylike Battle of the Women's Magazines
The Writer as Sexual Guru, by Erica Jong
NEW YORK
THE MOST EXCITING PLACE TO LIVE IN THE CITY
WHERE TO EAT, SHOP, AND LIVE IT UP IN THE HISTORIC CAST-IRON DISTRICT
INSIDE SOHO: PULL-OUT MAP, REPORT ON HIGH-STYLE LOFTS

NEW YORK MAGAZINE; BY PERMISSION. THE VILLAGE VOICE; BY PERMISSION

The models for the new *Times*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

glassed-in office, which was next to his own, loudly vented his rage with a stream of appalling obscenities at her expense, and then left the building. It was a ghastly scene that left everyone—John included—in a state of shock.

Although few people realized it at the time, this episode effectively marked the end of the reign of the old guard on the *Times*'s cultural news staff. Three years later I officially succeeded John as the paper's chief art critic while retaining my position as art news editor. John was hoping to become the *Times*'s chief drama critic, but he settled instead for a brief, uncelebrated tenure as the paper's restaurant critic, an appointment that effectively brought his inglorious career to a close.

By the early 1970s, however, the project to upgrade the paper's arts coverage was overtaken by a business crisis destined to have a far greater impact on the character and quality of the *Times*. The paper's corporate managers discovered—much to the shock of the editors—that the *New York Times* was no longer a hugely profitable enterprise. Costly and outmoded labor practices, together with competition from television, changes in urban demography, and something less easily defined—call it the spirit of the age—had combined to impede the growth of the paper's readership, its advertising revenues, and its profits. It was no longer a certainty—or so I was told at the time—that the *Times* itself, as distinguished from the New York Times Company, was still even operating in the black.

The dropout generation of 1968—those idealistic, long-haired, pot-smoking, sexually liberated antiwar protesters—had no interest in the *New York Times*.

It was also said at the time that no editor of the *Times* prior to the 1970s had ever been obliged to operate under a strictly drawn budget. That was now to change—and so was the content of the paper itself, as the editors scrambled under emergency conditions to think up new ways to win back the readers and advertisers the paper had lost and to attract as many new ones as possible. To serve as a guide to what was to be, in effect, a wholesale revision of the *Times*'s journalistic appeal, the paper's management engaged professional market analysts to poll potential readers and advertisers, and within the paper itself an elaborate network of task-force committees was organized to brainstorm proposals for meeting the needs that the market analysts would uncover.

By an accident of circumstance, I had a ringside seat at some of these deliberations, for in the spring of 1972 I found myself obliged to assume the thankless task of serving for a three-month period as the cultural news editor of the daily *Times*. My immediate predecessor in that position, about whose total ignorance of the contemporary cultural scene a number of us on the cultural news staff had vociferously complained, was a veteran *Times* reporter who had never wanted the job and communicated his distaste for it—and for us—on a more or less daily basis. As I had been one of his most vocal critics—the breaking point came for me when I was denied extra space for a review of the Willem de Kooning retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art: our cultural news editor had never heard of de Kooning and could not see what all the fuss was about—I did not feel in a position to refuse when asked to take the job while a permanent replacement could be found. It was owing to that temporary appointment that I found myself in the spring of 1972 attending the meetings at which the market-analysis experts disclosed their grim findings to the editors of the *Times*.

Foremost among those findings was the shocking news that the *Times* then had no significant readership under the age of 35. It seemed that the dropout generation of 1968, as it was sometimes called—those wonderful, gentle, idealistic, long-haired, pot-smoking, sexually liberated antiwar protesters, extolled by such dignitaries as Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox as "the best informed, the most intelligent, and the most idealistic generation this country has ever known"—had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

no interest in the *New York Times*. As to what would be required of the *Times* to attract this new generation of selfless political idealists to its pages—well, that was when the findings of the market-analysis experts got to be really depressing. Interest in foreign news, the experts reported, was practically nil and interest in national news scarcely better. The arts and entertainment, which by this time included rock music, scored a good deal higher. Yet the bottom line was really this: according to the surveys, the two principal questions that could be counted upon to engage the interest of this potential under-35 readership were, What to do with its time and What to do with its money. In short: lifestyle. This was the news that gave birth to the new *New York Times* in the 1970s.

To understand the course upon which the paper's editors then embarked, it is essential to bear in mind that by the early 1970s the *Times* was the sole remaining daily broadsheet newspaper of general interest in New York. Its last serious competition—not in terms of circulation but in the quality of its journalism—had been the *New York Herald-Tribune*, which folded in 1966. In the years immediately following the *Trib*'s demise, the senior writers and editors at the *Times* had considerable difficulty in determining exactly what their competition might now be. The *Washington Post* was not then a contender; it did not command the prestige it subsequently acquired with its Watergate scoops in 1973, and it was not, in any case, widely read in New York. Similarly, the *Wall Street Journal* did not yet enjoy the kind of readership beyond the business and financial community it has acquired today. With the disappearance of the *Trib*, the *Times* was suddenly in the paradoxical position of feeling imperiled by its own eminence and isolation, for it found itself for the first time in its history having to look "down-market," so to speak, for models to emulate in charting its new course.

One of the models just then presenting itself for emulation—with an insistence that many of the paper's top editorial executives found highly unnerving—was *New York* magazine. Abe Rosenthal—who presided over the creation of the new *New York Times* in the 1970s as executive editor—frankly admitted to an interviewer that *New York* "used to drive me out of my mind." It is easy to see why. Abe had made his journalistic reputation as a foreign correspondent in Warsaw and New Delhi, and as city editor of the *Times* he had successfully revamped its traditional standoffish coverage of New York itself to give the paper's readers serious local coverage. But his New York wasn't *New York* magazine's New York. For Abe, having to think seriously about features like "The Ten Best Hamburgers in New York"—precisely the kind of "service" feature that was making *New York* magazine a howling success—was a new and sometimes bewildering prospect, as indeed it was for many journalists at the *Times*.

New York, which had begun life as a Sunday supplement to the *Trib*, re-emerged in 1968 as a brash, plugged-in, glossy weekly that exerted an immense and immediate appeal for readers in the under-35 market and their born-again elders. It was already proving formidable competition for the aging *New Yorker* under William Shawn, which, though it had itself quickly adopted the radical political views of the counterculture, had remained in most other respects too stodgy, too verbose, and too buttoned-down to satisfy the liberated tastes and appetites that the counterculture had unleashed upon middle-class life. Something like that was the problem now faced by the *Times*, too, and *New York* would soon play a key role in its transformation.

What the brilliant founding editor of *New York*, Clay Felker, understood about the counterculture more clearly than any other uptown journalist was that its preoccupation with style, status, and gratification had laid the foundations for an alternative mode of middle-class life and thus for a media market that would prosper if it offered sufficiently "hip" and flattering guidance to the new modes of etiquette and consumption that were in a headlong process of formation. Undeceived by all the blather about political idealism, Felker understood that the dropout generation hadn't really dropped out, after all. It had no need to. No sooner had it challenged the manners and morals of the middle class into which it had been born than the latter hastened to jettison

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

its conventions and proprieties and to embrace the new dispensations. Notwithstanding the costumes of poverty they affected and their vaunted repudiation of bourgeois materialism, graduates of the counterculture still had plenty of money to spend and plenty of leisure time in which to spend it on what interested them. They still needed places to live, and tips about the right kind of clothes to buy and the best places to hang out. In or out of wedlock, moreover, they were still producing kids, putting food on the table, arranging for acceptable schooling, and—contrary to their noisy repudiation of the bourgeois work ethic—getting good jobs. *New York* tapped into this growing market, which by the early 1970s was no longer exclusively a youth market, with what seemed like a perfect comprehension of its proclivities and pretensions.

Also making a considerable impact on the under-35 market was the *Village Voice*. Though it had been launched as a weekly newspaper mainly devoted to opinion, gossip, and culture in the 1950s—Norman Mailer had been one of its founders—it only acquired a significant readership beyond the precincts of Greenwich Village bohemia when the Civil Rights movement, the antiwar activism of the 1960s, and the emergence of the Gay Liberation movement in the early 1970s transformed it into a bible of the counterculture. Its influence on the *Times* may have been more surreptitious than *New York*'s—and it was certainly less openly acknowledged by the *Times* itself—but it was nonetheless real, especially in the kind of coverage the *Times* would now devote to pop culture, the downtown "scene," and the detritus of the sexual revolution.

Graduates of the counterculture had plenty of money to spend and plenty of leisure time in which to spend it.

The top brass at the *Times* professed to look with disdain on the *Voice*: Abe Rosenthal once described it to an interviewer as "an urban ill, like dog shit in the street—to be stepped over." For its part, the *Voice* unremittingly attacked the *Times* for its insufficiently radical political and cultural coverage. But by the time the new *New York Times* took shape in the mid-1970s, the two papers had more in common than either was willing to acknowledge. If the *Voice* remained raunchier in its language and more intemperate in its rhetoric, especially on racial and sexual issues, it, too, had to give more and more attention to the consumer interests of its own "down-market" readership, providing features on fashion and restaurants, while the *Times*, in turn, began to devote more and more space to subjects that had long been staples at the *Voice*—rock music, most conspicuously. The *Times* was even acquiring some *Voice* writers and editors for its cultural and opinion pages.

The point is, *New York* magazine and the *Village Voice* had between them effectively outflanked the *Times* on the lifestyle front before the *Times* woke up to the need to elevate lifestyle to a place of central importance in the paper. If *New York* was more "nouveau" bourgeois and the *Voice* more flagrantly bohemian in their respective styles, there were nonetheless many points of convergence in their take on life in New York—particularly, of course, in their joint rejection of that earnest air of middle-class civility and respectability that still pervaded the pages of the *New Yorker*, the newsweeklies, and the *Times*. Together, then, *New York* and the *Voice* proved to be irresistible models when the *Times* set about the daunting task of remaking itself by introducing what were, in effect, daily magazine sections devoted to "Living," "Home," "Weekend," and so on. And the pressure that *New York* and the *Voice* would now exert upon the new *New York Times* became all the greater when, in 1974—at the very moment when the paper's editors were under the gun to create a new journalistic agenda—*New York* acquired ownership of the *Voice*, a merger described by *Time* magazine as "a marriage of sandals and Gucci loafers, of body odors and Bal à Versailles, of radical cheek and radical chic." This was precisely the kind of journalistic union that the *Times* was now intent upon achieving for itself.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sticking One's Yech Out
Are You Hooked—By TV?
A Rock Freak's Lament for a Sta
In Midlife, Symptoms of Adolescence
SOAVE
BARBELLA
EVERYBODY'S DRINKING SOAVE. TAKE HOME A MAGNUM OF IT. BARBELLA SOAVE $3.99 A MAGNUM
Every Other Wednesday, We Select Five Excellent Wines, Create An Extravagant Dinner Around Them, and Serve the Dinner and All Five Wines to Each Happy Guest.
cellar
New Yorkers,etc.
A Futurist
Yes! Rioja wine goes well with seafood.
GEKKEIKAN PLUM WINE
The New York Times
The Living Section
The New York Times
Knocking Salt
Off Its Pedestal
Abstinence Without Remorse
The Pervasive Threat to Healt
French Vineyards: A Spirited New Guide
Wine Talk
Among Futurists, A Prophet of Boom
THE NEW YORK TIMES. REPRINTED BY PERMISSION

In today's *Times*, "lifestyle" is as important as the most serious issues of politics and policy.

The changes that followed upon this radical makeover of the *Times* encompassed more than providing expanded "service" sections on food, home decorating, and the arts and entertainment, however. The priority given to lifestyle journalism in the special daily sections soon changed the tone and style of the entire paper. Local, national, and foreign news coverage had also now to be written in a more relaxed, personal style, and to be accompanied by more and bigger pictures, along with new graphics and "pull quotes," as aids to a readership that was presumed—no doubt accurately—to have a shorter attention span than that of older *Times* readers.

Television was often cited as the cause of this diminished attention span among younger readers, and television certainly played a huge role in this change. Yet at the *Times*, print journalism still counted for more than television, and it wasn't until the impact of television had made itself felt in the creation of such publications as *People* magazine and *USA Today* that the *Times* began looking at them as even newer models for its

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

future. By the time I resigned from the *Times* in the spring of 1982, the influence of *People* on the *Times* was pervasive in every section of the paper, beginning on Page One, and *USA Today* was much discussed as a sign of what the *Times* might look like when it got around to printing its daily and Sunday editions in color.

From their onset in the 1970s, these changes took a heavy toll on the morale of the paper's newsroom, for it was becoming increasingly apparent that the glory days of national and international reporting were drawing to a close. Except in moments of crisis at home or abroad—occasions when the editors of the *Times* still felt obliged to provide the paper's readers with massive coverage, if only to compete with television—serious reporting was now becoming an endangered vocation. That was no longer where the main action seemed to be at the *Times*, nor where promotions were likely to be made in the next generation. All the glamour and opportunity was now concentrated in the softer sections of the paper.

With the emergence of the new *New York Times*, bureaucracy—often Byzantine in its complexity—became part of the daily routine.

As for the effect of all this on the newsroom reporters, I have a particularly vivid memory of a Wednesday evening in the 1970s when the Thursday "Home" section of the *Times* was making its debut. As I was working late that evening—probably to meet a deadline for the Friday "Weekend" section—I took a break to wander into the area of the newsroom where the first copies of the next day's paper were usually brought down from the composing room around 9:30. Among those who had gathered there that evening was Homer Bigart, renowned as one of the *Times*'s star reporters and something of a legend in the profession.

When the paper appeared and we started to look through its pages, there was a sudden hush. There, in big block letters on the front page of the "Home" section, was a headline that read: REVOLUTION IN FAT PILLOWS. Everyone turned to Homer, who looked both embarrassed and horror-stricken. "Well," he said, as he threw his copy of the paper back on the pile, "I guess that's one revolution I'm not going to cover," and left the building. Everyone understood it was an historic moment.

One of the areas of the paper most directly affected by this decision to give lifestyle a priority status in the *Times* was my own. In the new *New York Times* it was said that coverage of the arts would be expanded—given more prominence, more space, more manpower, more resources of every kind. It didn't quite work out that way in practice, however. In terms of size, the new Friday "Weekend" section, introduced in 1976, was certainly ampler than the news "hole" for arts coverage that the cultural news editor had to negotiate daily with the "bullpen," the committee of editors that tightly controlled the division of space in the paper. But "Weekend" was only partly to be an arts section. Its principal mission was to offer readers information on—what else?—how to spend their time and money on the weekend, and this often meant places to go and things to do that had nothing to do with the arts. On every other day of the week except Sunday, the space actually available for arts coverage was significantly diminished. When the full complement of daily special sections was finally in place, the arts were relegated to the back pages of those sections, sandwiched between the lengthy features on food or home decorating and the TV listings.

Then, too, what now qualified as serious arts coverage was changing as the rush to make the *Times* "read young" acquired more and more momentum. The fine arts—classical music, ballet, and the visual arts—could still command important space for major events, but the accelerating coverage lavished on pop culture had the effect of first diminishing and then effectively eliminating coverage of the kind of small-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

audience recitals, performances, and exhibitions that are essential to the variety and vitality of New York cultural life and give it an intellectual density seldom found in like degree elsewhere in the country. Yet it was precisely events of this sort that were unlikely to show up in the market-survey analyses now determining what the *Times* should cover.

Another ingredient in the changed outlook of the *Times*'s arts coverage was the paper's newly felt compulsion to beat the competition—such as it now was—in reporting new "trends." I put the word in quotation marks because it became something of a joke among the writers charged with the awesome responsibility of divining—or, as was often the case, fabricating—some trend-setting development in the arts that *New York* magazine or the *Village Voice* or more recent arrivals like *Rolling Stone* had not yet condescended to publicize. In the 1970s, the *Times* was still desperately attempting to live down the days when it was usually the last place in town to recognize some new fashion in the arts, and as the 1970s was a period in which new fashions in the arts were announced in virtually every press release that landed on our desks, this compulsion to be first with what might be "next" became something of a mania with the editors and a considerable dread for the writers.

Thus it was that in my last years on the *Times*, the principal critics and reporters on the cultural news staff had to attend weekly lunches with the editors at which the first question always was: "What's new?"—meaning, of course, *new that week*! To fortify ourselves for the ordeal of these weekly interrogations, a few of us would repair before noon to Sardi's Bar, a *Times* hangout conveniently reachable down a back stairway to 44th Street, before ascending in higher spirits to the editors' dining room on the 11th floor. It was on one of those occasions that I was made to realize how preposterous this whole enterprise had become. For on that day, when the question "What's new?" was asked, I astonished myself by quickly responding with, "Nothing—nothing's new," and my editor came back just as quickly with the question: "Is that a trend?" Everyone laughed, of course; but then it fell to one of my hapless colleagues to draft a memo, which might then become the basis of a feature article, on this sudden paucity of new trends.

Memos and lunch meetings, which inevitably generated more memos, were now the order of the day. In my first years as art news editor on the "old" *New York Times*, I had never been asked to write a memo about anything. Neither the cultural news editor on the daily paper nor the editor of the Sunday arts section ever queried me about what I or my colleagues on the art staff would be writing about before we turned in our copy. It was my responsibility to see that newsworthy art events were covered and to alert the Sunday arts editor about developments on the art scene that might be appropriate for coverage on the front page of his section. Otherwise, we had a free hand. Bureaucratic intervention was all but nonexistent. On the Sunday art page, I even wrote the headlines and captions for my own articles.

With the emergence of the new *New York Times*, however, bureaucracy—often Byzantine in its complexity—became part of the daily routine. This inevitably altered the tone of the arts coverage. If an art event was to be featured on the front page of the "Weekend" section, for example, its point of view had to be either "positive" or "controversial"; otherwise its coverage would be consigned to the back pages. It wasn't the purpose of "Weekend," after all, to tell *Times* readers what to avoid on the art scene, either because it was grossly overrated or simply meretricious. In the 1970s, with the SoHo galleries having become an international center of grossly overrated and meretricious art that was (for that very reason perhaps) extremely chic, the pressure on critics to be upbeat in their judgments inevitably caused problems—for me, at least. But there was never any shortage of writers eager to provide the required gloss.

The pressure to be upbeat also had its sources in developments outside the *Times*. In the 1970s, New York City was itself in a parlous condition. The crime rate was zooming, the quality of life was in sharp decline, the middle class was in flight, and the city was seen as unfriendly to the kind of busi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ness and investment that were its only hope for long-term recovery. All this was a matter of intense concern to the *Times* management, which correctly understood that its own growth and prosperity were inevitably tied to the fate of the city.

What effect this anxiety in high places had on the paper's coverage of local city news, I cannot say with any certainty. Under the editorships of Abe Rosenthal and Arthur Gelb, the *Times*'s news coverage of New York and its suburbs was certainly much improved, yet I rarely found that those news columns, however interesting in themselves, accounted for my own observations of life in New York at street level, so to speak. On the only occasion when I spoke out about it, asking why there was never anything in the *Times* about the Korean immigrants who had largely supplanted the Jews, Italians, and Greeks in operating dry-cleaning businesses and produce markets in the city, I was given the brush-off. It didn't occur to me until much later that the editors I had been speaking to rarely, if ever, entered such establishments themselves and therefore had no idea of what I was talking about.

It is an odd and unsettling experience to see a great institution like the *Times* shrink in importance as it expands in size.

It wasn't until black activists staged a menacing boycott of a Korean produce market in Brooklyn during the Dinkins administration that the Koreans turned up on the *Times*'s radar screen, and even then the *Times*'s ill-judged support of David Dinkins and its general reluctance to be disobliging to the sensitivities of the city's black political establishment in the paper's news columns severely compromised its coverage.

About the effect of the *Times*'s anxieties about the fate of New York on the paper's cultural coverage, however, I can speak with more certainty. Simply stated, the *Times* set out in the 1970s to sell New York to its readers, wherever they might be. Hence the emphasis on the kind of upbeat coverage of cultural life in New York that made the city sound like a perfect model of everything that was most exciting, stylish, cool, glamorous, and advanced not only in the world of the arts and entertainment but in the arts of living as well. Never mind that the writers of some of these celebrations of New York life went home at night to apartments with triple locks on the doors and iron bars on the windows, or that their kids were hiding their lunch money in their sneakers on the way to school in the vain hope that the bigger kids waiting to rob them wouldn't find it—or, for that matter, take a fancy to their sneakers.

Looking back on that period today, there are abundant ironies to ponder when one realizes that the upbeat image of New York so tirelessly advanced in the lifestyle sections of the *Times* in the 1970s and early eighties has come a lot closer to realization in the 1990s as the result of the election of Rudy Giuliani as mayor—a political milestone in the history of New York that the *Times* adamantly and often unfairly opposed when Giuliani first ran against the discredited tenure of David Dinkins. By that time, of course, I had myself left the *Times* and was writing disobliging criticisms of the paper's coverage of such matters in my "Times Watch" column in the *New York Post*.

"The *Times* feels spongier now, and it has lost much of its old zeal for hard news," wrote John Corry in 1994, in the memoir of his career as a reporter called *My "Times": Adventures in the News Trade*. He spoke of the "different rules [that] now apply": "The *Times* sees itself more as an agent for social change and an advocate of good causes," he wrote, and as a consequence "its news columns now have less urgency and far more editorializing," all in the service of the paper's "liberal social and political agenda." All of which was true in 1994, and all of which has gotten markedly worse in the full-color, six-section daily *Times* of 1998. It is an odd and unsettling experience to see a great institution like the *Times* shrink in importance as it expands in size, but that is what we are witnessing today.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It is in this respect, perhaps, that the *Times* has come more and more to resemble the liberal social programs of the welfare state, which the paper itself has done so much to advance and which are also, of course, deeply implicated in the lifestyle phenomenon. Like many of those social programs, which are now understood to be unwieldy and unworkable when not malignly antisocial in their consequences, the *Times* began life by addressing a clearly perceived need, yet over time it has developed into an institution engaged in a frantic search for needs to be addressed.

By mortgaging its future to the vicissitudes of lifestyle, moreover, the *Times* has forfeited the very thing that had always given the paper its distinctive identity: its gravity. Now, like so much else in American life at the end of the twentieth century, it is an institution adrift on the whims and pathologies of a style-besotted culture relentlessly engaged in ratifying the worst features of the cultural revolution of the 1960s.

Consider the distance that we—and the *Times*—have traversed since the late 1960s. For middle-class readers of *New York* magazine in 1968, for example, it was still something of a shock as well as a guilty titillation to find, along with features on "The High Cost of the Hamptons" and "the new nude look" in women's fashions, articles that extolled the virtues of "America's first youth riot" at the Democratic Party convention in Chicago, that heaped praise on the "exhilaration of nihilism" felt by the kids who participated in that riot, and that reserved the greatest admiration for the "lyrics" of a Jim Morrison song called "The End," that went:

> *The killer awoke before dawn*
> *He put his boots on*
> *He took a face from the ancient gallery*
> *And he walked on down the hall . . .*
> *He came to the door*
> *And he looked inside.*
> *"Father?" "Yes son."*
> *"I want to kill you.*
> *Mother—I want to. . . ."*

The writer of these articles in *New York* magazine in 1968, who is now an executive editor of the *Village Voice*, called "The End" "a mighty myth of catharsis, with an Oedipal backbeat," while acknowledging that "violence is [Morrison's] major motif." Middle-class readers of the *New York Times* 30 years later are now used to encountering many similar views in so-called reviews of rock, rap, movies, television, and less easily identifiable cultural phenomena, and are no longer shocked by them. For this is what the *Times*—and "all society"—now accepts as its lifestyle.

As for the distance the *Village Voice* has traversed in 30 years of setting the pace for what the *Times* will find it necessary to keep up with next week or next year, consider this item from the June 16, 1998, issue of the *Voice*: "In kicky NoLIta, where the scions of Soho meet the barons of the 90s boom, photographer Terry Richardson is having his first solo show. The walls of the Alleged Gallery on Prince Street are covered floor to ceiling with evidence of his arrival. Ripe tits, big dicks, and dead cats—the insignias of Downtown decadence—compete with images of missing children, predatory clowns, and drunkenness in all its puking splendor. Now and then, a blowup stops the eye: a self-portrait featuring Terry's cum smeared across his face; an homage to filmmaker Harmony Korine starring his toothbrush stuck up Terry's ass. And in the back room: turds! turds! turds!"

If those weekly cultural news-staff lunches are still in progress at the *Times*, I can well imagine what sort of discussion this item—written, incidentally, by the same editor who gave us that homage to Jim Morrison 30 years ago—must have engendered. And further into this same *Voice* article, there was this further reference to "the decade's emblematic crime: the schoolhouse shoot-out," accompanied by the news that "There's a Downtown version of this killer-kid pose that, for all its artifice, is a real expression of a new kind of cool." Who can be sure that by the time this issue of *City Journal* is off the press, the *New York Times* will not have found a way to sanitize these and similar "insignias of Downtown decadence" for Uptown consumption?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

An F for Hip-Hop 101

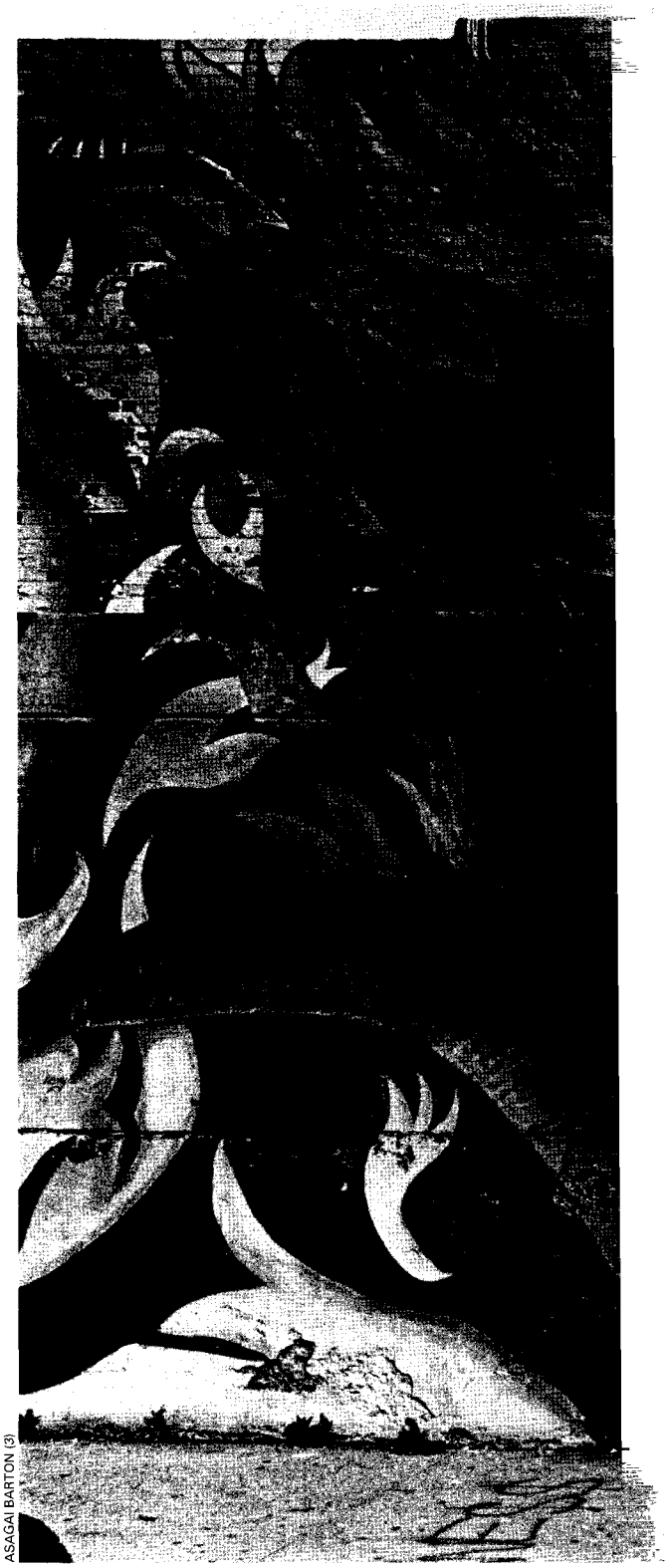
Heather Mac Donald

As the M train crawls toward Brooklyn over the Williamsburg Bridge, it traverses a gauntlet of graffiti. Scrawls cover every surface of the bridge—from the aging wooden trestles all the way up to the central towers, so impasted with spray paint that they appear made of lace. The cupola of a church, visible from the train, wears a graffiti crown of thorns. So it is sadly fitting that below, directly in the shadow of the bridge, students at a Brooklyn public high school are learning how to write graffiti for academic credit.

"I don't know what happened with this piece," instructor Edgar Miranda says impatiently, as he scrutinizes a student's design for "bombing" a subway car, or covering it head to toe in graffiti. The scribbles don't hang together as an artistic whole, Miranda frets. Another student fares much better. "This piece is dope," Miranda enthuses in up-to-the-minute street slang, praising a design of a smoking man on one side of a subway car with a whale-like bubble on the other. "You've actually used 'characters' "—graffiti terminology for human figures.

At El Puente Academy, progressive education's quest for "relevance" produces mighty strange results.

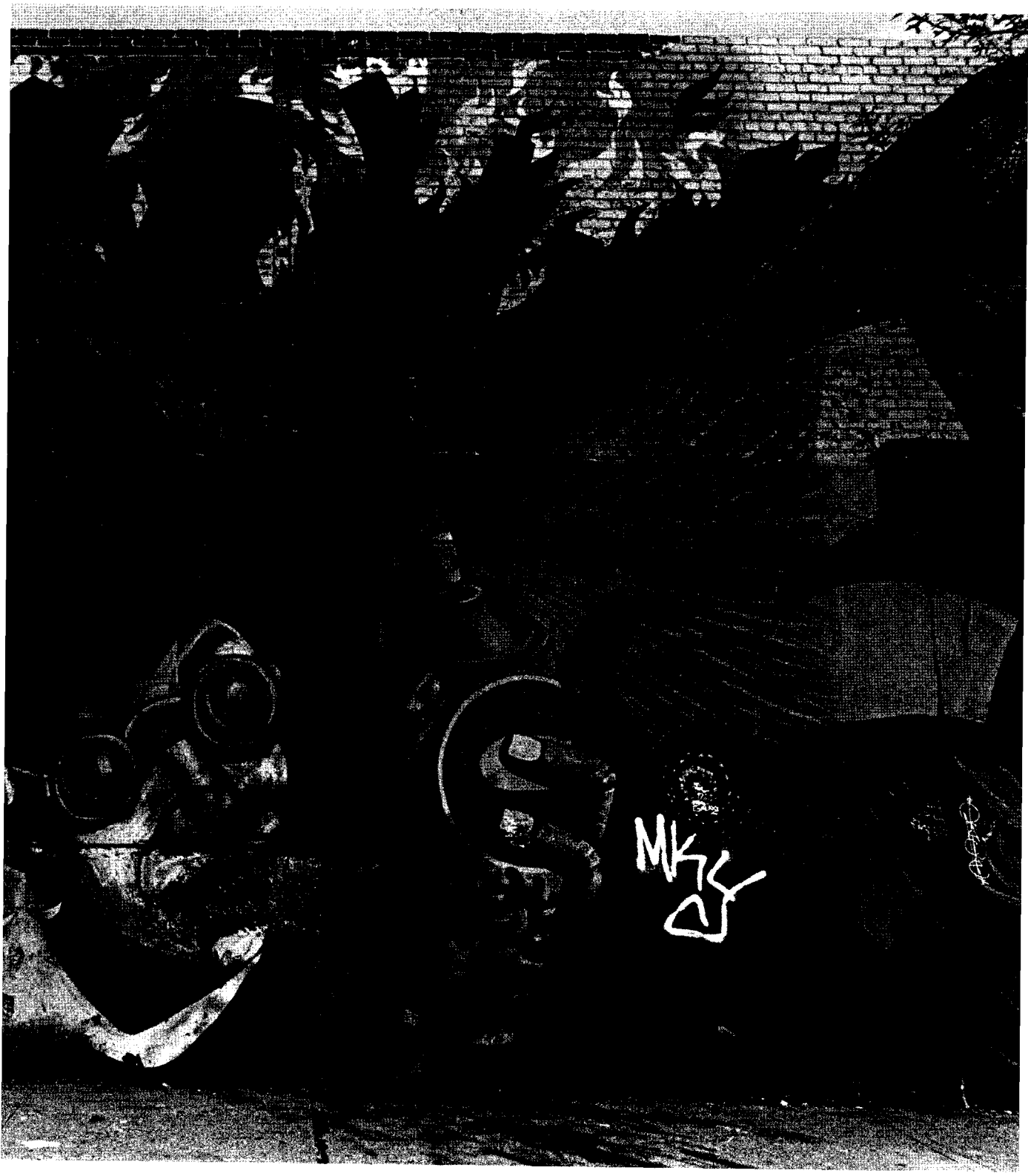
Welcome to Hip-Hop 101, at El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice, a course that teaches students not only how to write graffiti but also how to deejay at parties, break-dance (a once pop-



ASAGAI BARTON (3)

A graffiti project by students of El Puente

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ular form of street gymnastics), and emcee or rap. These four activities make up the ghetto-born movement known as "hip-hop culture." Hip-Hop 101 students carry around the traditional graffiti vandal's "black book" in which to perfect their personal graffiti "tag." Do they transfer their learning to the real world? "I have no knowledge of it, nor do I care to find out," instructor Miranda laughs. But of course, the answer is both predictable and easily within reach.

A quick glance around El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice would suggest that a course in hip-hop culture is about as needed as Viagra at the high school prom. El Puente is a small, very friendly, emphatically non-traditional alternative public high school, crammed into every cranny of an abandoned church in the Hasidic and Hispanic neighborhood of Williamsburg. The billowing denim, the beepers, and the designer logos on the school's mostly Hispanic student body suggest a keen awareness of every nuance of ghetto culture.

A quick glance around El Puente Academy would suggest that a course in hip-hop culture is about as needed as Viagra at the high school prom.

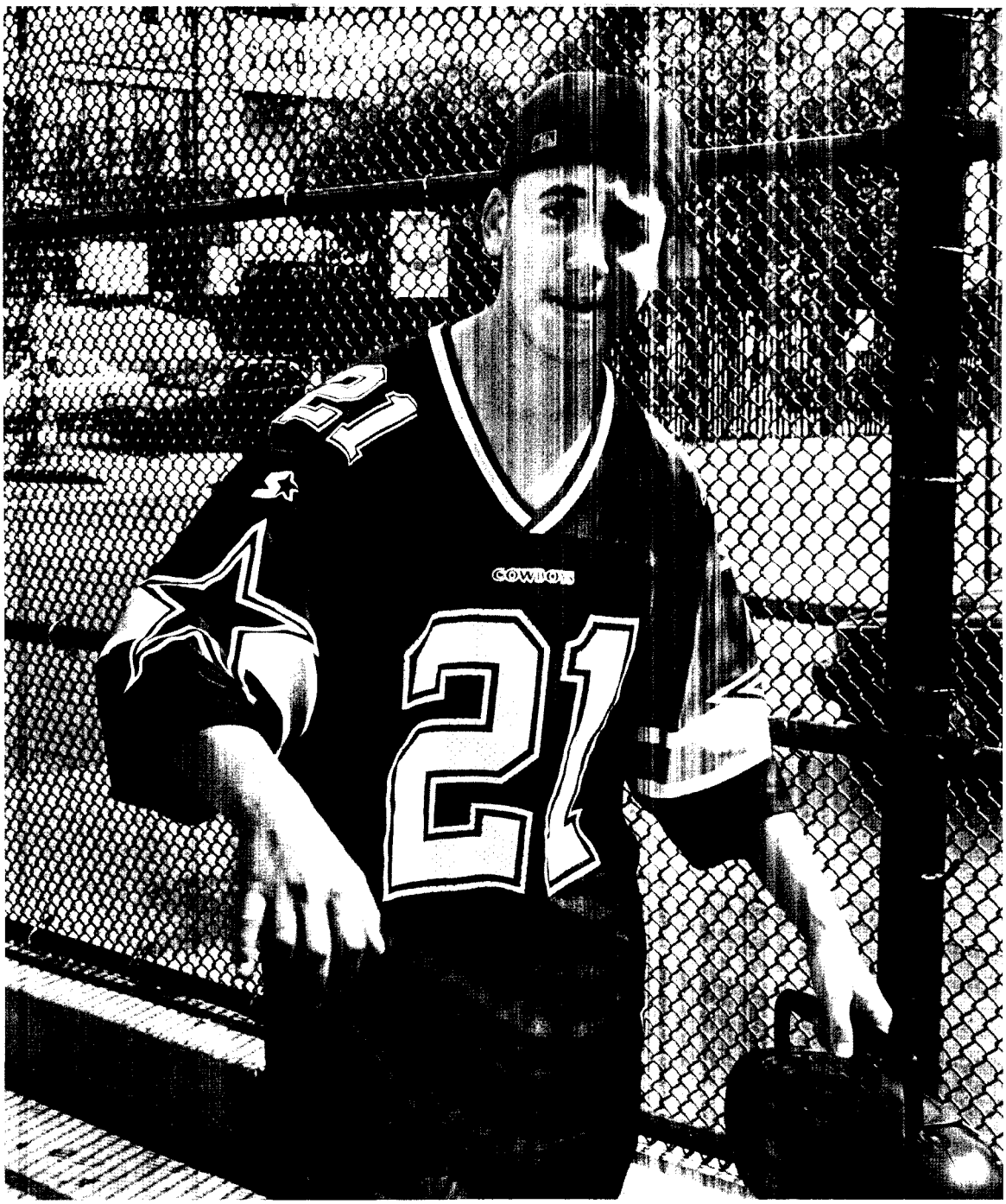
But El Puente is not about to let mere redundancy stand in the way of a class as trendy as Hip-Hop 101, for the academy is the very embodiment of progressive education, and Hip-Hop 101 is progressivism made flesh. El Puente calls its teachers "facilitators," considers the collaborative student group the foundation of learning, and organizes its curriculum around large, politically correct themes, like sweatshops or the connection between sugar and slavery. Also quintessentially progressive is the central role political activism plays in the school's mission. El Puente evaluates students on their commitment to "social and economic justice." The students have demonstrated such commitment by protesting a local incinerator as "environmental racism"; as part of El Puente's after-school program, they will soon staff a center intended to help the garment workers' union, UNITE, organize workers. Executive director Luis Garden Acosta summed up the school's philosophy to *Newsday* in 1992: the school is "not just about reading and writing and math," he said, "but it's also about wellness, career development, housing, racial justice, and peace."

This may seem a large agenda for a small school, but Acosta is used to thinking big. After serving in the administration of New York mayor John Lindsay in the late 1960s, Acosta joined the Young Lords, a militant Puerto Rican gang whose 13-point platform included such demands as the abolition of capitalism, "liberation for all Third World peoples," and "armed self-defense and armed struggle [as] the only means to revolution." Acosta has become more Establishment since then, but his rhetoric, with its talk of "education for liberation," contains much of the old fire.

For progressive idiocy, nothing beats Hip-Hop 101. The course is a classic example of student-centered learning. Rather than imposing a fixed, traditional curriculum, student-centered learning argues for letting students pursue their own intellectual interests (though assuming they reliably have any is, of course, the first mistake). In the 1960s, this doctrine picked up a new catchword: students and teachers alike began demanding education that was "relevant" to youth, especially urban youth. The result? Courses in ghetto culture—of which Hip-Hop 101 is an extreme example—that reinforce the parochialism of inner-city kids rather than open their minds to broader intellectual worlds.

Hip-Hop 101 epitomizes ed school progressive claptrap in a second respect: its implicit lack of concern toward El Puente students' glaring educational deficiencies. These students have a very tenuous command of basic skills. The school's average SAT scores in 1997—385 in verbal, 363 in math (out of a possible 800 in each)—lagged far behind the city's already abysmal average of 443 in verbal and 464 in math. During a non-traditional mathematics class, the students were stumped by the concept "at least." The phrase "There are at least as many adult men as adult women on a wagon

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



An El Puente student shows off his rapping technique.

train" means, they agreed, that there could be fewer men than women. The phrase "There is at least one child per family" means "There is no more than one child per family," explained one girl with brown lipstick and long tendrils of hair.

Any school administrator not blinded by the folly of progressivism would put such pupils on a strict regimen of real language study, filling their ears with the best examples of English prose, as well as drilling them on basic math. To spend any class time studying and writing rap lyrics, with their street slang and obscenities—not to mention studying graffiti and deejaying—is an unconscionable diversion from the students' real educational needs.

Unfortunately, Hip-Hop 101 is no aberration. Desperate for "relevance," teachers across the country swamp rap groups such as Run-DMC with requests for lyrics. In New York, many teachers use rap lyrics as a way of "relating to where [the students] are," in the words of a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

teacher at Park West High School. Graffiti instruction is not yet as widespread, but it's a worrisome portent that Columbia University's Teachers College, the fountainhead of progressive-education gospel for the city and the nation, invited Edgar Miranda to give a presentation on Hip-Hop 101 last December. And El Puente's foundation support—the school has received thousands of dollars from the Annenberg Foundation—gives it the stamp of Establishment approval. Hip-Hop 101, then, provides a troubling benchmark for how far the trivialization of contemporary education can go.

How could a school so lose its moral bearings that it cheerfully teaches illegal activity? Hip-Hop 101's pedigree includes not just progressive pieties but also the 1960s' widespread belief that crime was a quasi-political protest of the oppressed. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, graffiti started metastasizing across New York City, quickly evolving from runic "tags" scrawled on mailboxes and walls to huge multicolored murals covering every inch of the city's subways. And just as quickly, the elites began romanticizing it. *New Yorker* cartoonist Saul Steinberg declared the commission of graffiti a "necessity for entering the art scene." Norman Mailer, America's premier guru of adolescent rebellion, brayed that with each graffiti "hit," "something in the whole scheme of the system gives a death rattle." A *New York* magazine cover story in 1973, called "The Handwriting on the Walls: Should We Love It and Leave It?" cheered the "first genuine teenage street culture since the 1950s" and sneered at the "executive in his camel's hair coat," who cringes in subway cars with windows and interiors wholly blackened by paint. Did graffiti make the working stiff and office clerk feel besieged? So much the better, the elites gloated; they're faceless conformists anyway, whereas graffiti "artists"—they're authentic! Naturally, all the fawning media attention merely increased the incentive to "tag."

Did graffiti make the working stiff and office clerk feel besieged? So much the better, the elites gloated; they're faceless conformists anyway.

Soon enough, the media discovered that graffiti was part of a bigger, more exciting movement: hip-hop. In the seventies, many of the kids who were spraying subway cars were also staging open-air discos in Bronx parks. They would plug their sound systems into light poles and compete at deejaying—not just playing albums but also producing odd sounds by scraping the record with the stereo stylus. Eventually, they started talking over the instrumental breaks in songs, a practice known as emceeing or rapping.

Competition was fierce. "If the crowd didn't like you, you might get shot at," rapper Grand Master Flash recalled in 1983. Early raps celebrated partying and sexual prowess or railed at ghetto conditions. To accompany the rapping, kids spun and twirled like dervishes in a form of street dance called break dancing or B-boying. Here, too, the line between artistic competition and ordinary street violence was sometimes thin. "A [dance] battle would get you into a fight," former break-dancer Steve ("Mr. Wiggles") Clemente told the *Washington Post* in 1995. "[Crazy Legs, another break-dancer] got his jaw broken. He got jumped, I got jumped. Now we're more mature."

The graffiti vandals, rappers, and B-boys organized themselves into "crews," somewhat less criminal forms of association than gangs. Some ended up break-dancing and spraying graffiti murals at Lincoln Center and the Kennedy Center; most turned out less glamorously. Almost half of all 15-year-old graffiti writers apprehended in 1974 had been arrested three years later for burglary and robbery. Says one survivor of the late 1970s graffiti and break-dancing scene: "[A lot of us] were stickup kids, things like that. We all did our foul stuff also."

In the early 1980s, film crews and reporters descended on Washington Heights and the South Bronx to capture this movement. Sure, graffiti was colorful and break dancing energetic, but what really attracted the media was hip-hop's attitude and style. As rap impresario Bill Adler has explained: "The meaning of [rapper] LL Cool J, whatever his explicit message is, is 'I'm young, I'm black, I don't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sing, I don't smile for the camera, I don't wear a tuxedo, and I'm still making stupid dollars.' "

The elites ate up such contempt. Hip-hop, *Time* magazine enthused breathlessly in early 1983, was "black, young, and ineffably, unflappably cool, . . . like spray-painted murals down the side of a New York City subway, or a ghetto blaster carried on a shoulder broadcasting 130 beats a minute all over a Bronx street." *Time* swooned over "rapper flash . . . the jeans, the leathers, the heavy personalized belt buckles, even the jewelry," and tittered knowingly at ski cap "legends like I'D RATHER BE SKIING [that] refer not to snowy slopes but to white mounds of a certain illicit inhalable substance."

Today, rap music has overwhelmed all other aspects of hip-hop culture. Defeated in the subways, spray-painted graffiti has slunk back to walls and telephone booths, its glamour dulled. Break dancing may as well be a minuet, for all its current attraction to teens. Yet hip-hop, defined now almost exclusively as rap and attitude, is stronger than ever. Not only does it generate billions of dollars annually in record, video, and clothing sales, but it puts food on the table of many a professorial home, whose owners reciprocate by conferring on hip-hop the impenetrable jargon of the academy. Sample, courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania's Houston A. Baker Jr., former president of the Modern Language Association: "We meditate the legal 'X' of erasure not in an effort to assume the role of latter-day phenomenologists—but to consider the inversive and brilliant powers of symbolic transformation possessed by African-Americans."

Progressive-education theory, then, may have put Hip-Hop 101's "facilitator," Edgar Miranda, in the classroom, but three decades of graffiti glorification and ghetto romanticization have given him his lines. Miranda is a wiry and articulate 27-year-old, with a narrow face and dark eyes framed by heavy glasses, goatee, and ponytail. His vintage graffiti cant is untouched by the broken-windows thesis or insight into the seriousness of quality-of-life crimes or any of the other advances in our understanding of public misbehavior. Miranda has a personal stake in graffiti glorification. "When I did graffiti," he recalls nostalgically, "I was making a statement. I was poor and small and grew up on public assistance."

In promoting graffiti, Miranda uses the favored strategies of academic apologists everywhere: false analogy (graffiti is like "hieroglyphics or petroglyphs in Caribbean caves"; "my students are learning an arts discipline, like if I asked them to draw a still life"); romanticization (graffiti is a "cry for notice: 'I'm still here!' "); and changing the subject.

Changing the subject—or the "root cause" strategy—is the most useful ploy. "To talk about graffiti," Miranda says, "you must critically look at the socioeconomic resources of the community." Or: Youths do graffiti because they "don't see themselves in a positive light on the news." (How defacing property will improve youths' image, Miranda doesn't explain.) Some "root causes," however, are taboo. In laying out the deficient "resources" of the community, Miranda observes: "If you give yourself a tour of a New York City housing project, you would find table-hockey tables in the community centers missing the plastic parts." Well, aren't the deprived youths themselves the "root cause" of those missing parts? "You can't solve the problems in one week," Miranda responds philosophically.

Invoking root causes allows Miranda to evade the biggest blind spot in graffiti glorification: the impact on the property owner. Why, I asked him, should a small property owner bear the costs of cleaning up graffiti? "You're missing the larger question," Miranda shot back. "Why are young people painting on this building?" Miranda never answered the smaller question.

Actually, Miranda does have a solution for the small property owner—reach out to youth. Artists are starting to gentrify the area around El Puente. Remember that, according to Miranda and every other graffiti glorifier, graffiti is, above all, artistic expression. And yet, oddly, Williamsburg's new residents don't recognize graffiti vandals as fellow artists. In fact, according to Miranda, they're downright offended when their doors get tagged. One friend of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Miranda's, however, "trips out" his fellow artists, Miranda says, because he has the only untagged door on his block. The reason? He has "reached out" to youth. "Young people see these [new residents] as invaders," Miranda explains. Their response: "'What are you doing here?' Ta! Ta! Ta!," Miranda cries, mimicking the blasts from a can of aerosol paint.

But why should the burden be on the property owner to "reach out to youth" as a precondition of unmolested property? Small business owners, in particular, find New York's hostile business climate overwhelming enough; to demand that they also engage in youth outreach to ensure a graffiti-free storefront is extortion. I asked Miranda if his graffiti students would be allowed to tag El Puente Academy. No, he replied—"how we look at it is, they don't tag their own home," and El Puente is like their home. It turns out that graffiti is rich artistic expression as long as it's on someone else's property.

It turns out that graffiti is rich artistic expression as long as it's on someone else's property.

Miranda may get the opportunity to test his convictions soon, for he is planning to buy a house in Williamsburg. I ask him: If someone tags your house, does that make you an oppressor? "I don't want to get down on the person," he says, beneficently. It would be interesting to know how long his open-mindedness will continue, if local teens decide to "resist the economic conditions of youth" on his front door. For now, however, his graffiti and hip-hop gospel is unsullied by conflicting loyalties.

One day last April, Hip-Hop 101 met in a bright classroom at the top of a narrow staircase. The students sat in a large semicircle, pressed up against the far walls of the room; Miranda, wearing a black Young Lords T-shirt inscribed with the slogan EVERY GENERATION CARRIES THE STRUGGLE FORWARD, lectured in front. Ironically, Miranda is a neat, organized teacher with terrific graphic skills and a fairly strict classroom manner. Rather than putting the students in collaborative groups, he uses a question-and-answer format. Students take exams and write research papers. But there, any similarity with traditional education ends.

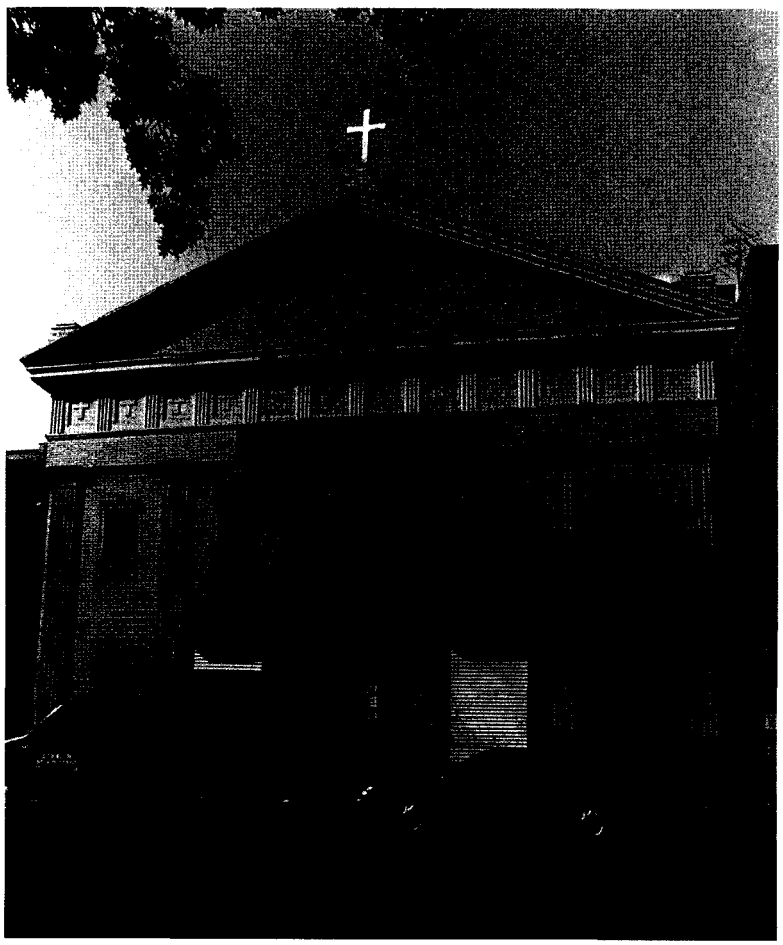
Take the exams, for example. These tested the students' knowledge not of history or literature but of graffiti principles. In one, the students had a mere ten minutes to execute a sketch for "roasting" a subway car—a clever simulation, no doubt, of real-world conditions. In another, the students had to produce a more elaborate full-color mural on an 11-by-17-inch stencil of a subway car—like target practice on a human outline. "Points were taken off if they did fill-ins" or violated other graffiti conventions, Miranda explains. That day in April, Miranda individually examined those few students who had actually completed their graffiti assignments ("What are the style, elements, and theme of this piece?"). The students were supposed to write a short essay addressing these questions; few, if any, had done so.

Such academic conventions add up to a "fine arts" course, rather like studying the Renaissance, Miranda claims. Just for the record, it does not. Leaving aside for the moment the all-important question of illegality, graffiti remains, with few exceptions, a crude (if energetic) form of visual expression.

During Miranda's one-on-one student conferences, the rest of the class, directed to practice their individual graffiti tags in their black books, just sat passively, waiting for the next part of the class. That came quickly, since there were so few graffiti murals to examine. Before closing out the section on graffiti, Miranda once again quizzed the class: "When we talked about hip-hop, we talked about its four elements—graffiti, emceeing, B-boying, and deejaying. Who can describe what graffiti is?" "The expression of selves," answered one student. "Artistic expression," chimed in another. Good, they've got it. Time to move on to break dancing.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Either out of good pedagogy or because there is so little substance to Hip-Hop 101, Miranda frequently reviews material from previous classes; evidently, classroom drill, anathema to progressive educators, is permissible for subjects dear to facilitators' hearts. After drawing a lovely freehand map of the Western Hemisphere on the blackboard, Miranda recaps a lecture on the transmission of African culture to the Americas. The students remain a bit confused over geography. Asked why a dance, the *capoiera*, began in Brazil, one student answers that the slaves were going north in the underground railroad. So crammed are today's students with the by-now iconic figures and institutions of the abolitionist era—the only historical figures they've reliably encountered—that these keep popping up in inappropriate places. When Miranda asks for manifestations of African culture in the United States, the students volunteer, correctly enough, songs and spirituals. But then they keep going with the underground railroad, Harriet Tubman, and the code name "Moses"—all only distantly related, if at all, to Africa. Such free associations suggest that what these kids need most is history, not hip-hop, but that is not the agenda here.



El Puente students "tag" even their own school.

From his thumbnail sketch of early African-American culture, Miranda jumps to the present. "How is hip-hop similar to or different from these elements?" he asks. To get the class thinking, he writes "Gangs, Crews and Family" on the board and asks them to respond. Except for the mention of "drugs," "cops," and "fighting," the image of gangs that emerges bears more resemblance to the Elks than to the perpetrators of drive-by shootings. Family, however, receives the highest marks. As one student explains: "Family is like something you should keep real with. Your gang can only go so far with you; your crew and your family can go all the way with you." Not the ideal endorsement, perhaps, but an endorsement nonetheless.

Next, Miranda quickly traces the emergence of break-dancing crews from street gangs, mentioning in passing the noble, communitarian origins of the Black Panthers and the Young Lords. Then, it's time for that staple of modern education: watching videos. Miranda recycles even these, popping in for quick review two videos that the students

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have already watched. In the first, a 1983 PBS documentary on graffiti, the camera pans over massive graffiti murals as the cheerful narrator, who sounds as if he just stepped out of a 1960s educational film of the *Better Living Through Chemistry* ilk, extols the hip-hop state of mind he calls "rocking." "For graffiti artists," he explains admiringly, "it's rocking the city with your name on the train; for the B-boys, it's rocking the mike." The scene shifts to a dance floor on which two break-dancing teams compete by writhing and spinning. One boy moons the competition; another finishes his number by grabbing his crotch.

In the next video, a low-budget movie from 1984 called *Wild Style*, a terrified-looking white woman with platinum hair and a string of pearls wanders woodenly through a throbbing black club scene. As a rapper in a turtleneck chants: "I'm proud, I'm proud to be black, you know," the blonde tentatively starts smoking a joint and swaying to the beat.

Debasing the classroom with the most superficial aspects of contemporary culture is no guarantee of student interest.

Bing Crosby in blackface could not have come up with a more stereotypical portrayal of blackness.

However devoid such videos are of intellectual content, nothing so fully conveys the educational vacuum that is Hip-Hop 101 as the students' "research" assignments. Miranda had brought into class heartbreakingly neat file folders, filled with carefully copied articles from such fan magazines as *Rap Pages* on such topics as the "neglected but not forgotten West Coast graffiti scene," deejays on the black-run New York radio station Hot 97, and up-and-coming Latino hip-hop. To write their "research paper"—on "pioneering artists in hip-hop"—the students had merely to pick out a few articles and summarize them.

Nothing in this assignment comes remotely close to offering the slightest shred of education. Miranda's students may sense, however remotely, that they are being shortchanged. I asked a student who was sitting slumped in his chair why he had not responded to Miranda's call to pick up some articles. "I got those magazines in my house, too," he answered, contemptuously.

Now what is the payoff from this craven capitulation to anti-intellectualism? Virtually nothing. Student-centered education promises to deliver excited, involved learners. None of those was in evidence at Hip-Hop 101. Students slouch in their chairs, eyes glazed, though at least they are not disruptive. No one bothers to open a notebook, much less take notes. Miranda might as well be translating Sallust, for all the "active learning" going on. And students still hand in assignments late and incomplete.

So the bargain has proved hollow. Progressive educators jettison the great body of Western learning in a desperate bid for students' attention, only to find the same blank looks and poor performance said to be the natural outcome of dead languages and white male Anglo-European authors. Debasing the classroom with the most superficial aspects of contemporary culture is no guarantee of student interest.

What Hip-Hop 101 has guaranteed, however, is a future supply of graffiti "artists" in the city. El Puente officially denies this. Alpha Anderson, the school's courtly assistant principal, says quite sincerely: "I don't think anyone has the right to spray-paint your property; we don't advocate that." Miranda is far less straightforward: "I'm not telling them what to do and what not to do." Such calculated neutrality is hardly convincing. But even if Miranda had tried to discourage real-world application of his lessons, it is preposterous to think that a course lionizing graffiti vandals will have no effect on its students' graffiti production.

Miranda's refusal to intervene in his students' extracurricular activities has an unimpeachable source: progressive-education ideology. "Following [Marxist pedagogue Paolo] Freire, I don't have the power to tell a young person what

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to do and not to do," Miranda asserts. "I can give them the tools"—an unfortunate image—"and they find the path. If I tell a child, 'don't, don't, don't,' they'll say, 'Why always No?'" But the role of a teacher, despite progressive theory, is precisely to exercise intellectual and moral guidance; once that is abdicated, education is not possible.

Well, Miranda may not care to find out, but how are his students applying their knowledge of graffiti principles? I ask a tall boy in a big jacket, who has been sitting low in his seat, legs splayed, throughout the class, to show me his black book. It is filled with scribbles resembling tangled fishing wire. "I've been practicing my Gs," he explains. Like many of the class's budding graffiti "artists," "Jigga" (the boy's *nom de can*) is modest about his accomplishments. "I just started with graffiti—on phones," he says, "but I'm not a pro yet." Who decides if you're a pro? I ask him. "If you will look corny, [then you're not a pro]," he replies. But who judges? "Yourself and what people say about your pieces." Jigga knows what he needs to do to become more professional: "More style, more graphics. When you write bubble letters, it's wack, it's corny. You have to be [more] creative."

Like any downtown artist, Jigga seeks exposure. "You go writing everywhere, because the more you get around, the more famous you are." Are there any samples of his work in this neighborhood? I ask. He nods. Jigga obviously does not shrink from competition, since the area around El Puente is already tagged to saturation.

Another boy has not yet made his professional debut, but he intends to. "You take a plain wall and make it look so magnificent," he says dreamily. Like Jigga, this husky boy knows his artistic limits: "When I first started [practicing], it was kind of corny, but I'm getting better at it. I want feedback." Where will he debut? "Well, I live on Coney Island," he hints.

Not all Miranda's students share such artistic ambition; some, in fact, repudiate the message that graffiti is art. One baby-faced boy, who got 100 on his subway mural exam, says he doesn't like graffiti: "It's just messin' up other people's property." But many students are convinced that doing graffiti represents a career path. "These are established artists," a boy with a nascent mustache tells me. "If a kid wants to start developing himself, they do travel, if they make it big." Another adds: "People do get hired. Pepsi . . . Marvel . . . and a clothes line, PMB, was started by three graffiti artists."

Youth culture can be cruel, however. For all Miranda's street talk and cool demeanor, he is already obsolete. One student, asked what he thought of the class, responds witheringly: "I'm not going to comment. I expected to learn how to professionalize on the lettering, but I already knew everything." Another student agrees: "Most of the stuff in the class I already knew. It was more like a refresher." There is a lesson here for anyone who dares teach popular culture to teenagers: don't bother—you'll be behind before you even begin.

Hip-Hop 101 is on the same spectrum as other progressive-ed nostrums, not in a world of its own. That a school could embrace a practice both illegal and destructive of the city's spirit is a troubling indication of how far the educational system has lost its bearings. Desperate to show "sensitivity" to minority students and to create subjects in which they can unequivocally excel, schools have cast aside responsibility for academic and moral education. The decision to teach graffiti is also the natural outcome of the inclusion of contemporary popular culture in the curriculum. Once you shrink from distinguishing Montaigne from Madonna, it becomes indefensible to make distinctions within low culture and exclude aspects of it that some benighted segments of society deem illegal.

El Puente's teachers and administrators are clearly well-meaning, but they could not have designed a course more likely to keep their students down than Hip-Hop 101. Meretricious and evanescent, hip-hop "culture" is simply not something that schools should waste a single second on when facing children as ignorant of the wider world as El Puente's are. But cutting-edge educators are sleepwalking through the apocalypse, seemingly indifferent to the educational meltdown we face. •

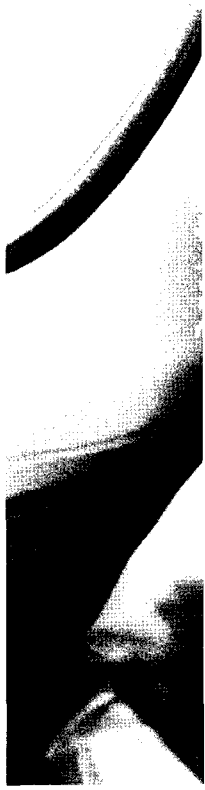
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Politics of Virtue

Tucker Carlson

Republicans have won the national debate over economics. Now two leading mainstream presidential contenders are turning to the culture, determined to roll back the excesses of the 1960s.

After the pants-down presidency of Bill Clinton, the presidential election of 2000 may well become a referendum on the entire cultural legacy of the 1960s, of which Clinton is such an emphatically corporeal embodiment. Two of the highest-polling contenders for the Republican nomination—Governor George W. Bush of Texas and Senator John Ashcroft of Missouri—are likely to stage campaigns based on resurrecting the traditional morality that the sixties rejected. Both men believe that the key issues in the race will be cultural ones, and they are almost certainly right.



Republicans, after all, have already won the other big ideological dispute—the battle over economic fundamentals—even if the irresolute congressional GOP has for now run out of tax-cutting steam. Americans have come to the generally conservative conclusion that capitalism brings prosperity and socialism doesn't, that higher taxes and increased regulation harm rather than promote the common good, and there is no longer much debate on the subject. True, congressional Democrats haven't given up their piecemeal efforts to expand the reach of government and its regulating, tax-gathering hand, but no one makes the theoretical case for bigger, more expensive government nowadays. Even among most Democrats, left-wing economic assumptions are moribund.

Cultural matters remain contentious, however, often hotly so. But up till now, even though conservative intellectuals have been preoccupied with cultural issues for years, mainstream Republican politicians have tended to shy away from them. During the 1996 presidential race, the only Republican candidates who discussed values and ethics—notably, Pat Buchanan and Alan Keyes—were those who had no hope of winning their party's nomination. Nominee Bob Dole limited his comments on moral questions to a few cryptic and much-mocked

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

For Texas Governor George W. Bush, reforming the culture is crucial to America's future.

asides about "character," which pundits dismissed as an awkward attempt to appease the religious elements in the Republican party. For the most part, mainstream Republican lawmakers have been content to leave such questions to their colleagues on the religious right, and the mainstream press has in consequence felt emboldened to dismiss any discussion of this kind as "extremism."

That is about to change. America is on the verge of a re-moralized politics, articulated not by anyone remotely dismissible as extremist but by impeccably establishment politicians.

Bush and Ashcroft, 51 and 55, respectively, belong to the generation associated with the 1960s, like 51-year-old Bill Clinton, and their politics, like his, have been shaped by that era. They

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

too are Yale-educated centrists who came of age during the Vietnam War and went on to become popular governors of border states. (In Bush's case, extremely popular: this fall he is expected to become the only Texas governor in more than 25 years to be reelected.)

The similarities, however, end there. Where Clinton remains the poster boy of the self-indulgent ethos of the sixties, Bush and Ashcroft give speech after speech filled with references to responsibility, self-control, and restoring the culture to greatness. For both men, the sixties offered no "rich fulfillment" of American ideals of liberty and creativity, as the now infamous 1994 *New York Times* editorial "In Praise of the Counterculture" had it, but cultural breakdown. In Ashcroft's words: "As we are examining the pathologies of American culture today, we should look back to see . . . the seeds sewn in the sixties. . . . We set a tone of license—of freedom without responsibility. We thought it would be freedom without consequence, but the consequences are upon us." Or as Bush puts it: "The new culture questioned everything—our faith, our values, our moral standards of behavior. The sharp contrast between right and wrong became blurred, and a new standard of conduct emerged: 'if it feels good, do it.' Individuals are not responsible for their actions, went the thinking, we are all victims of forces beyond our control. . . . We went from accepting responsibility to assigning blame."

What's so important about Ashcroft and Bush (or, on the local level, Mayor Rudy Giuliani), is that they are willing to say: enough. The sixties legacy—the legacy of the sexual revolution that said any kind of sexual arrangement was OK, the legacy of the idea that society rather than the individual was to blame for crime and poverty, the legacy of the counterculture's blanket denunciation of traditional social values—is family breakdown, skyrocketing crime, and an underclass mired in social pathology and unable to climb the ladder to economic success. The culture that the sixties created—the beliefs that shaped individual action as well as government policy for over three decades—caused the most pressing social problems we face today, these politicians are saying, and it's time America challenged the reigning assumptions of that culture head on.

As you'd expect with more than two years to go till the presidential election, neither Bush nor Ashcroft has yet articulated a very detailed platform—indeed, strictly speaking, neither one has announced presidential aspirations. Still, the outlines of the themes both men would run on are visible.

Bush's central message is this: the main cause of poverty in late twentieth-century America is not a bad economy but bad choices. As governor, he is waging a "right choices campaign" that is a key to his thinking: it is a public relations effort designed to change the personal behavior of Texans. His list of wrong choices reads like a witch's potion to ensure failure: "dropping out of school, not finding and/or maintaining steady work, abusing alcohol and drugs, and having a baby out of wedlock." All these social pathologies, Bush understands, derive not from any lack of government funding or from poverty—not from the "system" or from a bad environment—but from low standards and bad personal choices.

The worst choice of all, as Bush sees it, is illegitimacy, which he considers the root of many of the other ills. When a woman ends up on welfare, he believes, the most likely cause is not that she can't find work but that she is raising an illegitimate child. It is a point that contradicts more than 30 years of received opinion among liberal policymakers, but Bush delivers it as if it were obvious. In a way it is, of course, since even for liberal social scientists it's a cliché that female-headed families are significantly poorer than traditional two-parent ones; but liberals have shied away from the inescapable conclusion that policymakers should strongly discourage single motherhood.

Not Bush. About 30 percent of children in Texas are born to single mothers, compared with 32.4 percent nationwide, and Bush has worked hard to bring down that number. His solution to illegitimacy is straightforward and boldly unfashionable. "Abstain from sex until you find the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

partner you want to marry," he frequently tells high school students in speeches around the state. For kids raised in a society that derides self-control and promotes condoms, birth control pills, and abortion as the solutions to pregnancy before marriage, these are extraordinary words to hear from a governor. But Bush pronounces them without a trace of harshness or malevolence—and without sounding in the least reactionary. Indeed, he has the ability to espouse pre-sexual-revolution social values while coming off as positively cutting-edge, even revolutionary—which, of course, he is. For teenagers, Bush says, "abstaining from sex will lead not only to a higher-quality life, but to a more decent and compassionate life for all of us. It's part of a larger vision of a better America."

In Waco, a city that records a higher incidence of out-of-wedlock births than any place in Texas, Bush has enlisted local churches, synagogues, and schools in a pro-abstinence public relations campaign that emphasizes the consequences of illegitimacy. "We will love the babies," Bush says, "and in some cases we will help the moms, on a temporary basis. But we've got to say to our children: Abstain from sex." Abstinence, he says, "speaks to economics. We are in a time of plenty in America. Yet there are some who are struggling economically. A lot of that has to do with people having babies out of wedlock." Here, of course, is a glimpse into Bush's thinking about the future direction of welfare reform: policymakers must provide for the welfare of the illegitimate babies who will still be born (though in smaller numbers) despite all efforts to discourage unwed motherhood, but that doesn't mean that single mothers themselves will necessarily be entitled to support—and certainly not long-term support.

When Bush talks about reforming the culture, he invariably mentions the extensive role that religious groups must play. "In the past it used to be that we called upon government to provide compassion," he says. "But government can't make people love one another. It's an impossibility." In particular, he believes, the welfare reform effort needs the participation of religious groups, because welfare recipients need the value-laden moral exhortation to get control of their lives that religious groups can deliver far more effectively than any government functionary. "The role of government," Bush explains, "is to be a participant in—a funding mechanism for—encouraging people of faith to become an integral part of the delivery of welfare. As we move away from centralized welfare programs, it gives us an opportunity to encourage faith-based organizations to become a part of the delivery of social services." As an example, Bush cites his recent efforts to allow Chuck Colson's Prison Fellowship ministries to take over certain parts of Texas prisons. "We're not only helping people on a temporary basis with the most compassionate care there is," he says, but, through moral teaching, "we're also helping to change lives." When Bush says he wants a greater role for religion in our public life, though, it's important to add that he's not being sectarian. Instead, he's talking about a clearly articulated set of values most of us can agree on: "love your neighbor, give an honest day's work for an honest day's wages, don't lie or cheat or steal, respect others—and always remember you are responsible for what you say and what you do."

Bush's central message is this: the main cause of poverty in late twentieth-century America is not a bad economy but bad choices.

In all this, Bush knows whereof he speaks, since he had his own conversion experience, renouncing the cultural values of the sixties and finding a new importance in religion. Before his marriage, Bush had a reputation (from all accounts, deserved) as something of a wild man. When he speaks, it is as a grizzled veteran of the sexual revolution. But he is a changed man. He gave up drinking entirely on his 40th birthday, and with teenage twin daughters, he is the consummate family man. Friends say that the influence of his wife, Laura, a former librarian and teacher, caused him to think deeply about the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

limitations that government faces when it attempts to change human behavior by its usual value-free means.

"The thing we've got to figure out is how to expedite a cultural change," says Bush, who refers unselfconsciously to the task as a calling. "Baby boomers can now empirically say, 'We've seen a culture change in our lifetime, so I know it can change again.' The hope for my generation is to usher in the Responsibility Era. Responsible behavior means making right choices and having the courage to say that there are right and wrong choices. The Responsibility Era—those aren't hollow words." Bush—who, like a leader utterly confident of his own vision, claims never to have taken a poll while governor—is aware that he is beginning to sound more like a prophet than a politician, and he doesn't mind. "In my judgment," he says, "the people of Texas appreciate a leader who talks this way."

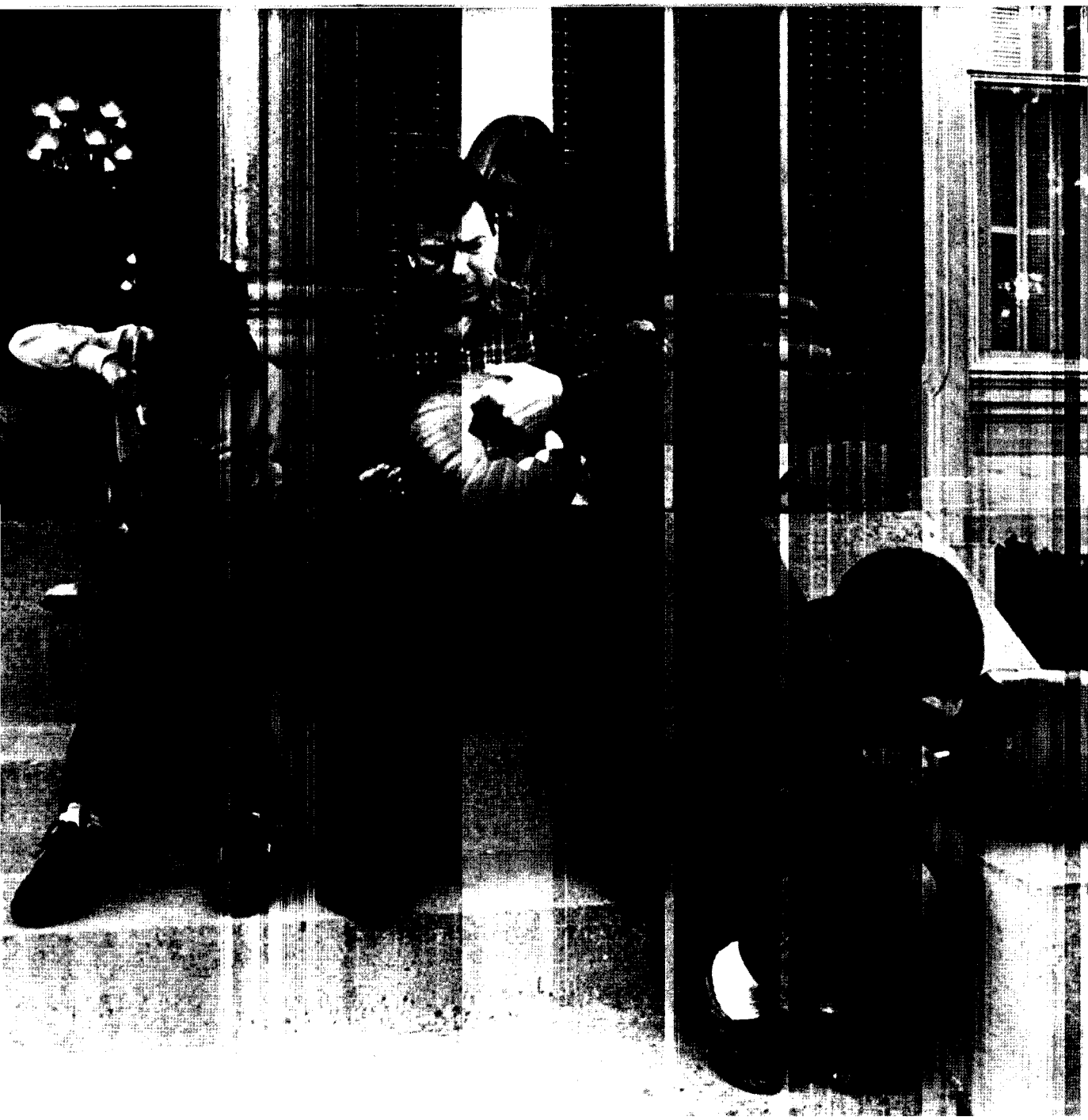
Bush has been successful in his effort to enlist the help of religious groups to deliver welfare services, thanks in part to the "charitable choice" provision of the welfare legislation that Congress passed in 1996. The provision, added by Senator John Ashcroft, made it legal for religious organizations to use tax dollars to deliver relief to the poor. This spring, Ashcroft sponsored a more extensive charitable choice bill, currently in committee, which would allow churches to provide many more services traditionally handled by government agencies, including drug treatment and low-income housing. Predictably, the bill has met with strong opposition, but Ashcroft remains convinced that partnerships with faith-based private-sector organizations are key to cultural renewal. "It's not enough as a conservative just to disengage the government from what it does poorly," he says. "We've got to activate the culture in what it does well."

After more than 20 years in politics, Ashcroft understands what government does well, as well as what it cannot do. The son and grandson of ministers, Ashcroft was elected attorney general of Missouri twice, served two terms as the state's governor, and came to the Senate in 1994. For someone associated with no-nonsense moral crusades, he is relaxed and cheery in person—his hobbies include gospel singing and motorcycling—but his voice assumes a preacher's cadence as he explains his vision for the country. Like Bush, he is certain that sweeping changes are possible—and he wants to make them. "We have it within our power to make the world over again," he says. "It's theological: God created us to make consequential choices. That's the essence of personal responsibility."

The polls may not always reflect it, Ashcroft says, but Americans care deeply about what has happened to their culture. "I don't think the people have ever said, 'All we care about is the stock market,'" he says. Americans also care about living in a country that is well governed and morally righteous. Things began to fall apart, he says, when the "doctrine of moral parity," widely embraced in the 1960s, destroyed the culture's ability to defend itself from poisonous ideas and behavior. All kinds of families became equally good, all kinds of sexual behavior became equally acceptable, and responsible behavior—like staying married or working for what some once called "chump change"—became no better than irresponsibility. "Once everything is equal, you're not allowed to stigmatize anything," Ashcroft explains. "Everybody gets the gold star. Since everybody gets the gold star, you devalue affirmation. What's a gold star worth if everybody's got one? It's worth nothing."

Ashcroft's disgust with false equality leads him to hold up Theodore Roosevelt as a model of leadership for our time. Roosevelt's serious respiratory illness, Ashcroft points out, didn't stop him from joining what the 26th president called "the fellowship of doers." Instead of yielding to victimhood,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



For Missouri Senator John Ashcroft, individuals are responsible for the choices they make.

Roosevelt fiercely built up his body and mind in pursuit of "the strenuous life"—a life of striving and accomplishment, not of seething in resentment. It's a bracing, and politically incorrect, message in an era of unearned self-esteem. For Ashcroft, individuals are responsible for creating their own fate.

Ashcroft's belief in making choices *mean* something shows up in his tough stance on crime. For him, crime is the responsibility of the criminal, not of the criminal's "oppressive" environment. As governor, Ashcroft increased Missouri's prison space 60 percent and reinstituted the death penalty after a 24-year hiatus. In the Senate, he's the chief sponsor of an innovative juvenile crime bill—the Senate Judiciary Committee approved it last fall, though it's still kicking around Congress—that would treat teen thugs as adults and make it easier for courts and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

schools to find out about kids' criminal pasts. Ashcroft also wants to extend charitable choice to juvenile crime prevention: he thinks faith-based institutions, with their stress on personal responsibility and inner transformation, will help troubled teens far more than do government-run programs that attack the "root causes" of crime with midnight basketball. Bush, too, has received national attention for his tough, no-nonsense approach to crime, as when he refused to commute the death sentence of Karla Faye Tucker last February.

America's culture since the sixties, Ashcroft believes, has undermined liberty and led to the exponential growth of government—and the two are related. "As you demolish or diminish the cultural restraints necessary for civility and community," observes Ashcroft, "a proliferation of laws fills the void." But how can we increase personal responsibility? Here, the senator says, political leadership becomes crucial: public officials can help shape the culture (statecraft is always soulcraft) through the moral rhetoric they use and the moral signals their policies send about what is, and what isn't, acceptable. Real leadership "calls people to their highest and best," Ashcroft notes, and doesn't surrender to what is "lowest and least" in human nature.

"As you diminish the cultural restraints necessary for civility," observes Ashcroft, "a proliferation of laws fills the void."

So far, this kind of rhetoric has gone over well with the Republican voting base. In a straw poll held this May in South Carolina, likely primary voters were asked to choose among 22 potential Republican presidential candidates. Ashcroft and Bush led the herd, ranking first and second, respectively. A recent CNN poll had Bush well out in front of other Republicans and beating Al Gore by 4 percent in the presidential race. The question, however, remains: are ordinary Americans ready to vote for candidates whose platforms consist of attacking the core cultural assumptions of the 1960s—which is to say, the core cultural assumptions of the 1990s?

They appear to be. Even in New York, for example, the holy city of American liberalism, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani has been doing battle with the consequences of the 1960s since he took office. Giuliani's crime initiative and civility campaign have been spectacularly successful because they have straightforwardly identified and challenged long-held liberal assumptions about human behavior (for instance, that criminals would be less apt to commit crimes if local government would simply provide more "compassionate" social services). Giuliani has held New Yorkers to higher standards of personal conduct, and New Yorkers have, for the most part, appreciated the results.

This spring, Governor Bush gave a speech at the Beverly Hills Hotel to a group of actors and movie industry executives. Though the conservative Wednesday Morning Club, headed by former leftist David Horowitz, arranged Bush's appearance, few of those in the audience—which included director Oliver Stone—qualified as conservative true believers. Yet Bush, with confidence in his own vision as a leader, did little to temper his message, forcefully explaining both the perils of illegitimacy and the effectiveness of abstinence. No one booed or snickered. On the contrary, the audience applauded.

Bush and Ashcroft will face a lot of audiences before the election of 2000, not all of whom will applaud. But it's likely that most people will listen carefully to what the two men say. They can hardly be written off as products of the feverish fringe. For the first time in a long while, the left—whose moral message lately has been limited to relatively trivial topics like teen smoking—may be forced to defend the culture it created. Sneering at conservatives or demonizing them will no longer pass as an argument.

For the voting public, it ought be quite an instructive debate. •

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A School Reform Whose Time Has Come

Sol Stern and Bruno V. Manno

Thirty-three states boast charter schools—fully public schools demonstrably superior to those the public education monopoly runs. What's keeping New York from climbing on board?

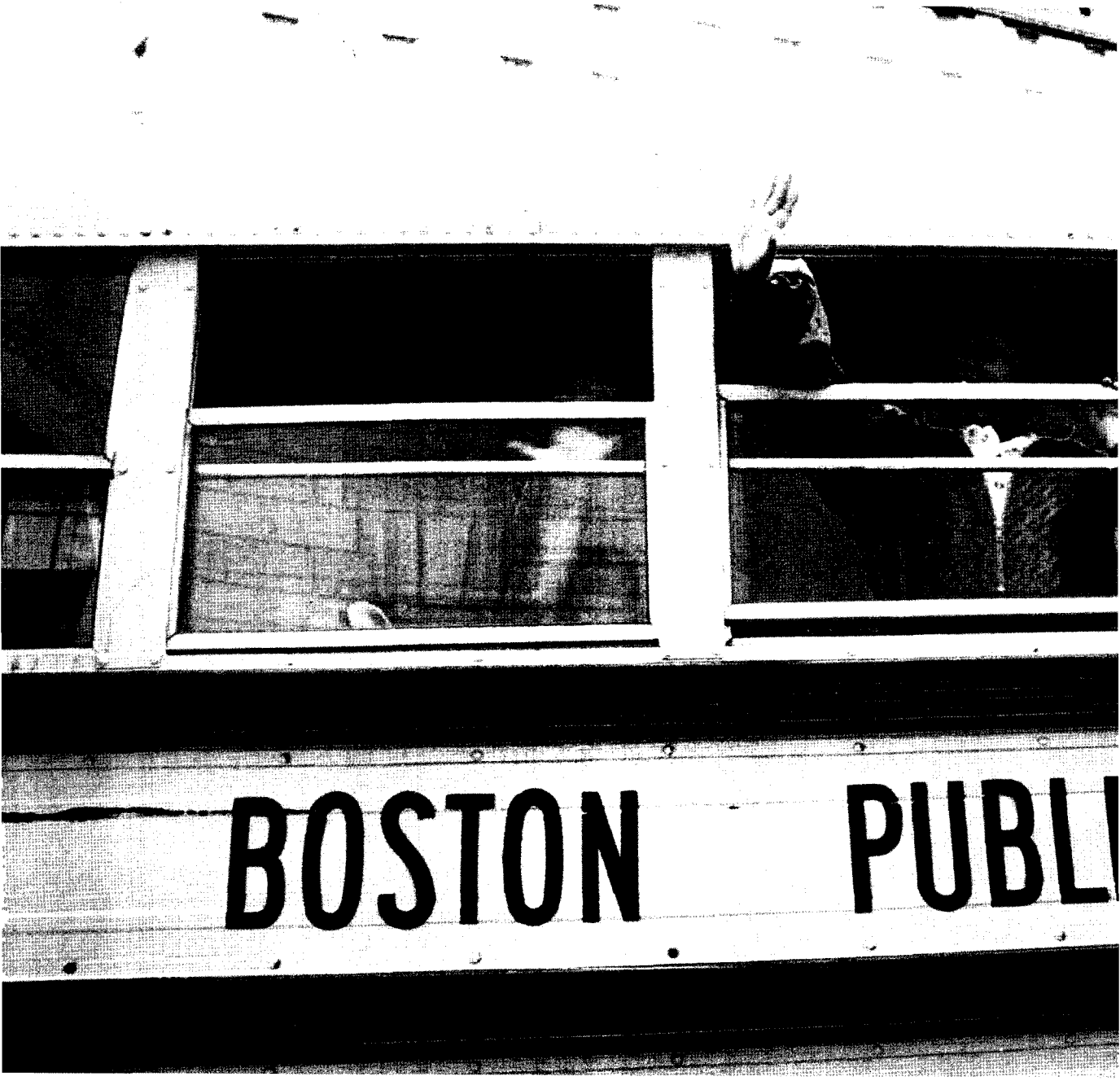
Charter schools are sweeping the country. Thirty-three states have passed charter school legislation, and across the nation some 800 charter schools are up and running, enrolling upward of 170,000 kids. The schools come in various sizes and flavors, from the staunchly traditional to the ultra-left wing. Their basic idea is simple: a school receives a "charter" from a school board, state education department, a university, or other agency to run for a limited time (usually five years), and it must meet strict performance standards to get its charter renewed. As long as they meet the standards, these schools—public and open to all comers—are free to skirt suffocating school district regulations and union work rules. In some states they can hire bright but uncertified teachers, just as exclusive private schools do. Most crucially, if they don't deliver, dissatisfied parents can take their kids—and the public money that accompanies them—elsewhere.

New York just squandered a golden opportunity to join the growing list of charter states. A surprising constellation of forces—a Republican governor with his eye on national office, a handful of deep-pocketed Wall Streeters, and a fiercely committed band of minority activists and legislators—had mobilized behind a bill that promised to give New York one of the strongest charter laws in the nation. Governor George Pataki's charter bill, had it passed undiluted, would have powerfully challenged the state's public education monopoly and would have exerted strong pressure on New York's dysfunctional public schools to do better. Yet, though it was difficult to find anyone in Albany who admitted to being opposed to charter schools, the education system's interests, led by the teachers' unions, prevented it from coming to a vote in the state's proverbially undemocratic and venal Legislature.

If you want to know what New York's kids have been missing, just visit the resoundingly successful Boston Renaissance School, one of the country's largest charter schools. Boston Renaissance is the brainchild of the nonprofit Horace Mann Foundation, whose trustees, certain that they could do better than the city's failed public school system, took advantage of Massachusetts' 1993 charter school law and obtained a charter from the state education department to start their own elementary school.

In short order, the trustees settled on a location and came up with an innovative educational program. With the Massachusetts Land Bank's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

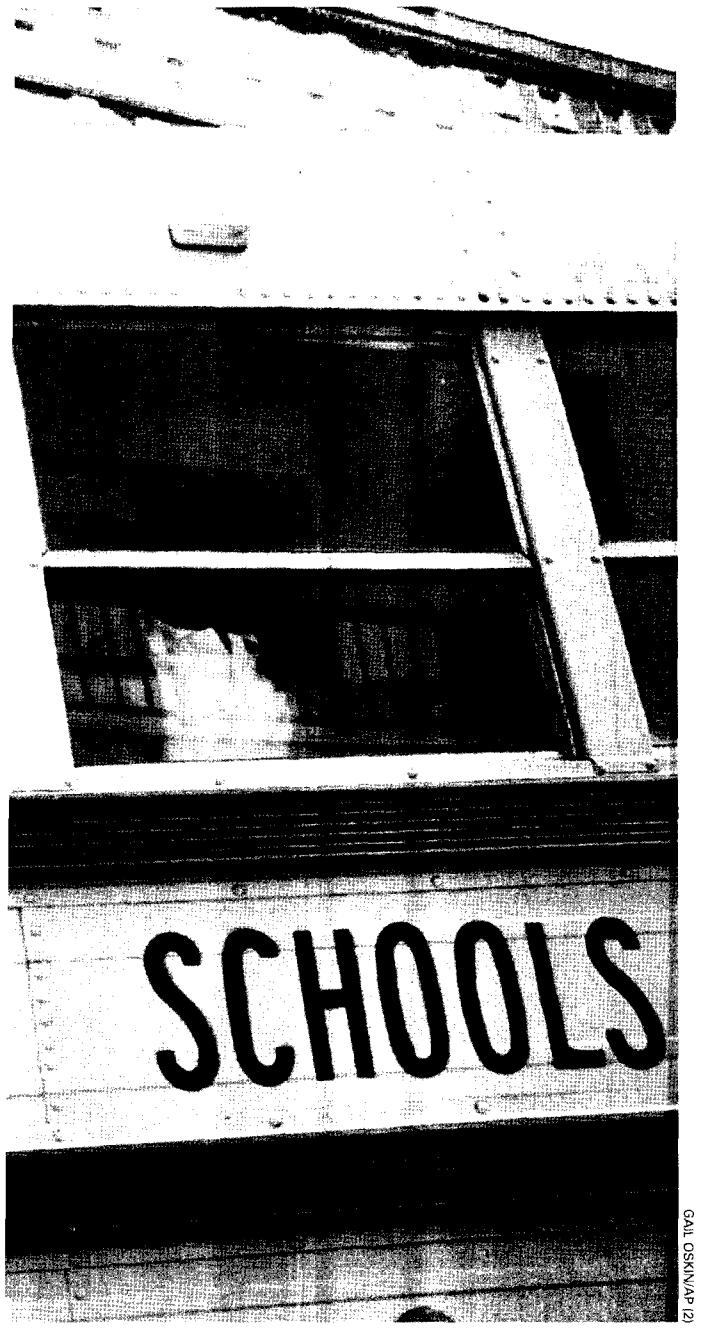


On the bus to the celebrated Boston Renaissance School, where 80 percent of the students are minorities

help, the foundation acquired space in a nondescript 12-story former office building in downtown Boston. Then they hired the Edison Project—entrepreneur Chris Whittle's for-profit education management firm—to design everything from testing tools to staff development. Most important, Edison provided a curriculum based on the sturdiest educational research. It included a phonics-based reading program, and it set clear-cut goals for every grade.

Choosing its students by lottery, as state law demands, Boston Renaissance opened in September 1995 with 637 students in grades K through 5 (including, as the law requires, kids with disabilities and special-education students). Two years later, the school enrolled 1,050 students—80 percent of them minorities—in grades K through 8. A waiting list of 1,000 kids exists for the few seats that become available each year. Thus far, the new school has performed better than even its early supporters might have hoped: a recent Massachusetts Department of Education study found that, while Boston Renaissance's students scored below the national average on standardized tests when they entered

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



GAIL OSKNAP (2)

the school, after one year they performed at or above grade levels.

One reason Boston Renaissance works so well is that it has more flexibility than does a traditional public school to tackle problems. For example, though the school's downtown location brought wonderful benefits—a safe neighborhood and easy access to Boston's rich history and culture—the cramped office building had no space for a cafeteria. With no school board bureaucrats tripping it up, Boston Renaissance was able to respond in a way unthinkable for a typical public school: a private vendor would bring prepared lunches, heat them in microwave ovens, and then distribute them to the classrooms.

The absence of a union contract adds to the school's flexibility. Boston Renaissance administrators can, for example, ask teachers to stay with their kids during lunch. These in-class lunches with the teacher present work marvelously: in one fifth-grade classroom, children sat quietly, eating at their tables, while their teacher, Kathy O'Flaherty, calmly chatted with a few kids—a refreshingly domestic and civil scene for anyone used to the escalating chaos of a typical public school cafeteria.

Free from union work rules, teachers spend more time at school. Boston Renaissance offers 200 instructional days a year, 20 more than other Boston public schools. The school day is also longer: sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students arrive at 7:30 AM, and don't leave until 3:30 PM, while teachers must be in the school from 7 in the morning to 4 in the afternoon. At least once a week, the school requires teachers to stay late for a staff meeting. And teachers must show up at least one week before the school year opens—five days earlier than in most public schools—for administrative and planning sessions.

Boston Renaissance's flexibility extends to the way it organizes teaching and how it pays its teachers. The school arranges teachers in teams and has master teachers supervise the work of less experienced colleagues. Ordinary teachers take home about the same pay they would in most public schools, though master teachers can earn more. Master teachers, in effect, receive merit pay—an idea teachers' unions strongly oppose—for what they've accomplished and how much they've learned. And, a huge difference from union-dominated public school systems, Boston Renaissance can fire teachers who don't measure up to its standards.

Since charter school teachers lack tenure and serve under renewable performance contracts, it must be hard to find good help, right? Wrong: resumés swamp Boston Renaissance from frustrated teach-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ers who work for the region's other public schools. Kathy O' Flaherty (who once taught in the Newton Public Schools) explains why: "We don't have to wait to make changes," she says. "We don't have to wait for the district to decide that what we are doing is within the rules. Also, we don't need the approval of the union. So we can really put the interests of the kids first."

Esterjuana Gliwinsky, Boston Renaissance's acting principal, agrees: the absence of red tape lets administrators and teachers do their jobs. "Unlike regular public schools," she explains, "we don't have to defend the indefensible. If a teacher doesn't work out, we can get rid of that teacher. If I can buy books at the book mart across the street for $1, I don't have to wait to order the same book through the district for $6." Gliwinsky came to the school as a fourth-grade teacher from Rochester, where she was once named New York's elementary school teacher of the year. A former union activist, she now believes that public education won't improve without charters shaking things up.

Indeed, one reason charter schools are such a great idea is that their competitive example might jolt the public school system to loosen its stranglehold on its own schools—as happened in Massachusetts after the state passed the charter school law. Fearing it would lose students to schools like Boston Renaissance, the Boston School Committee and the teachers' union decided to prove the regular school system could innovate, too. In an historic agreement, the two parties agreed to launch six Boston "pilot schools" with many of the same freedoms the state charter schools now enjoy, to forestall greater change.

Boston Renaissance is a completely new school, a "start-up," but other charters, like Los Angeles's Fenton Avenue School, are "conversions" of existing public schools. When Joe Lucente, Fenton Avenue's current principal, first came to the school in the early nineties, it was still part of the gigantic Los Angeles Unified School District. "I had heard stories about how bad it was, how it went through four principals in five years," Lucente recalls. "Then I met the district superintendent, and he described to me for over an hour in graphic terms how bad it really was." What Lucente heard was truly bleak: poor pupil attendance and poorer academic performance, low staff morale, a plague of gang activity, and a pervasive atmosphere of despair and violence. A blunt University of Southern California evaluator called Fenton Avenue "a hellhole."

For a couple of years, Lucente worked hard to improve the school, with little success; he began to think it was time to quit. Then, in 1993, the California Legislature passed a charter law, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

After a year at Boston Renaissance, students who once lagged behind perform at or above grade levels.

Lucente decided to try again to turn Fenton Avenue around—this time by converting it into a charter school. In 1994, he and his staff won a fight to secede from the city district and to operate independently through a state charter. The first task: to decrease class size. Hiring private vendors for food services and cutting administrative fat, the school saved enough money to add teachers and reduce class size from 30 to 20 for grades K to 3, and from 30 to 25 for grades 4 to 6. The savings also allowed Fenton Avenue to add after-school and Saturday programs, and even to rescind a 10 percent teacher pay cut that the district had previously ordered.

Within two years, Fenton Avenue had boosted student achievement significantly. On the California Test of Basic Skills—which covers math, reading, and writing—student scores jumped 16 percent the first year. After year two, scores for English-speaking students had increased an additional 5.5 percent, while for Spanish-speaking kids they went up a dramatic 28.7 percent. Impressed by such improved student performance, the state education department named Fenton Avenue a "California Distinguished Elementary School" in 1997, and Superintendent of Instruction Diane Easton called it "one of the nation's finest schools."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Perhaps Fenton Avenue's most impressive achievement, though, is the progress it has made in its novel technology program. Critics derided the lofty idea behind the plan as sheer fantasy: to create a technological infrastructure for the school "as good as the most technologically advanced university in the country." Fenton Avenue spent $1.3 million of its 1996–97 budget to put the plan into effect. The result: every classroom now hums with multimedia computers, VCRs and CD players, satellite and cable TV. The school even has a broadcast studio, allowing students and staff to tape their own shows on FCB—Fenton Channel Broadcasting. Two sixth-grade classrooms have realized Fenton's technological dream: a computer on every desk in this inner-city school.

While technology by itself is almost never the solution to educational failure, Fenton Avenue's wired classroom is not technology just for the sake of it. Instead, the electronic capacity enables staff and students to access an extraordinary range of curriculum materials they wouldn't ordinarily have: the class now takes a dozen electronic field trips around the world each year, seeing and hearing, to take one example, scientists who walk them through the dazzling flora and wildlife of subtropical Africa. It's a salutary example of technology supplementing, not replacing, good pedagogy.

By borrowing the language of charters, teachers' unions can claim to celebrate "school choice" while in fact they continue to fight it.

Not all charters are as effective as Boston Renaissance or Fenton Avenue. Some, faced with overwhelming start-up costs, have fallen apart, while others have been frauds. Many states don't yet have the mechanisms in place to help legitimate charter schools surmount their early difficulties or to help parents smoke out humbug.

You can read about the charter schools that have stumbled in Thomas Toch's recent cover article in *U.S. News and World Report*. In Michigan, Toch recounts, ruthless profiteers founded charter schools on sites they owned—and then squeezed exorbitant rents from them. Also in Michigan, one Afrocentric charter school, instead of observing Lincoln's or Washington's Birthday, celebrated "Malcolm X Memorial Day" and various other African holidays, stoking a fervid multiculturalism that would prove deeply divisive if it spread through inner-city schools. In Arizona, Toch found, a few charter schools practiced flagrant nepotism in admissions.

But unlike traditional public schools, if you don't like what you find, you can get out. Nor do charter schools escape scrutiny the way typical public schools do: if a charter flunks, it's far more likely to get shut down or to have its weaknesses exposed than is a traditional public school. At least a dozen charters have been closed so far, and with five-year reviews coming due for many, the number of closings will only grow.

Still, despite the occasional bad charter school, it's clear that many Americans are desperate for alternatives to failing public schools, and nowhere more so than in inner-city neighborhoods, where parents grasp at charter schools, tuition tax credits, vouchers—anything to get their kids out of a system that effectively condemns many of them to a bleak future. And what's ultimately telling is that charter schools are so popular with those who know them best: the kids, parents, and teachers directly involved. A Hudson Institute study one of us co-authored discovered that most charter students find their schoolwork interesting, respect their teachers, and will probably stay enrolled. Parents usually remain satisfied with charter schools, the study showed, while teachers often find professional fulfillment in working for one. Satisfaction is highest when what's at stake is immediately educational—class size, curriculum, teaching. It is lowest when attention turns to non-educational worries—food services, school facilities, sports—a vivid sign that charters are deploying their limited means on what really counts.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The politics of charter schools are tricky. It's hard to find anyone in public life these days who opposes the basic charter school concept—something you couldn't say about school vouchers. The charter school movement makes for strange bedfellows, from President Clinton to ex-education secretary and virtue pundit William Bennett. Even the powerful national teachers' unions say they're on board: "Charter laws give educators and parents the chance to create the schools of their dreams," enthuses National Education Association head Bob Chase. "Let me first take credit for charter schools," announced Thomas Hobart, president of New York State United Teachers, at a recent charter conference. "Over a decade ago at the National Press Club," Hobart claimed, "[American Federation of Teachers head] Al Shanker stood up and said we should have charter schools."

Beyond the rhetoric, however, big differences loom. Teachers' union leaders have a very specific idea of what a charter school should be—and it's nothing like Boston Renaissance or Fenton Avenue. In a 1996 report, Shanker's AFT held up Rhode Island's charter school law as the model for other states. But Rhode Island forces charters to follow existing collective bargaining agreements and says they can't hire uncertified teachers and administrators—throwing out a key ingredient that makes charter schools work. The state's legislation is so restrictive that, to date, Rhode Island has just one charter school. By borrowing the language of charters, teachers' unions can claim to celebrate "school choice" while in fact they continue to fight it. Charters become a firewall to prevent further reform.

Many charter school supporters, on the other hand, view charters as a first step toward *greater* choice. Arizona's elected state superintendent of education, Lisa Graham Keegan, for example, has been one of the country's most enthusiastic advocates of charters. The state now has 250 charter schools, in large part thanks to her. But Keegan turned to charters only when, as a state legislator, she failed to get a voucher law passed; for her, charters are a second-best option that will, by whetting the public's appetite for choice, breach the public education fortress and win the day for a fully competitive voucher system.

In New York, the teachers' union has always set the terms for education reform, so it's no surprise that the state lags behind most of the country when it comes to challenging the public school status quo. As the largest contributor to New York political campaigns, the union has profoundly influenced the drafting of education bills. One egregious case from the mid-1980s: the misnamed Excellence in Teaching Bill. The bill added $1,000 to the annual salary of every teacher in New York City—whether excellent, mediocre, or completely inept in the classroom.

In the Legislature, neither party has had any interest in education reform. Democrats are creatures of the teachers' union, but even Republican legislators, like their Democratic colleagues, mainline teachers' union campaign money, so they're loath to criticize the monopoly that supplies it. And many Republicans don't really care: they tend to represent upstate constituencies that are happy with their local schools and that dismiss education reform as an inner-city concern. As one leading Republican assemblyman once told *City Journal*, "Education isn't one of our issues."

But during Governor Pataki's first term, the national debate on education reform began to shift—against the public school monopoly. A host of other Republican governors, including Tommy Thompson of Wisconsin and Pete Wilson of California, scored significant political victories in prodding reluctant state legislatures to consider reform. Voters increasingly associated Democrats with stubborn teachers' unions and wretched inner-city schools. Suddenly, education had become a conservative issue. Sometime during the past 18 months—perhaps when he began to dream about national office—Governor Pataki joined the reformist trend with his charter school bill.

As charter bills go, Pataki's was as good as they get. Under it, several agencies could have chartered new schools: the state education department, of course, but also local boards of education, a new state chartering agency, and even the mayors of the state's largest cities. The bill permitted charter start-ups and made room for converting existing public schools, and, unlike charter laws in many states, it wouldn't have put an upper limit on the number of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

charters. New York's charter schools could have hired uncertified teachers for their talent; principals could at last have managed their schools free from restrictive union work rules. Picture it: exciting schools sprouting in Bedford Stuyvesant, Harlem, the South Bronx—everywhere hopelessness is endemic and the old system is in greatest disrepair.

Pataki proposed such a strong bill only because an unusual coalition held his feet to the fire on reform. On the right, there was Change-NY, a conservative lobbying group founded by several prominent Wall Streeters that has raised millions of dollars for Pataki; and there was John Faso, the dynamic Republican minority leader in the State Assembly, who grasps the political potential of charters to bring Republicans and minorities together. At the coalition's center was the Center for Educational Innovation (affiliated with the Manhattan Institute), which laid the public groundwork for charters through a series of cogent, well-attended forums. And on the left was an informal group of black and Hispanic activists that included ex-representative Floyd Flake; Gail Foster, president of the Toussaint Institute, a community-based organization that helps inner-city parents find alternatives to the public schools; and Brooklyn Assemblyman Roger Green. The fact that support for charter schools spans New York's political spectrum is a sign of how intolerable the public school monopoly has grown. And the coalition is not going to go away. As Thomas Carroll, Executive Director of Change-NY, stresses: "The 'strange bedfellows' coalition for charter schools in New York grows stronger with each passing day; there's no doubt charter legislation will be adopted—either at the end-of-year legislative session, or at the latest, next year."

That minority leaders like Flake, Foster, and Green all embrace charter schools reflects the changing political alignments in the minority community over education reform. During the past two years, polls have found strong support among blacks—60 to 70 percent—for school choice. One index of support for school choice is that in New York last year, 20,000 black and Hispanic parents applied for a chance to receive one of 1,300 private school scholarships, worth $1,400 each, from the School Choice Scholarships Foundation.

Charter schools raise the question of what is public education? For too long, the only approved answer came from teachers' unions and their supporters: it's an education, they said, that unionized government bureaucracies provide with taxpayer money. But what's central to the idea of public education is public funding, public standards, and schools open to all—not government employees and a one-size-fits-all institution. In theory, a system composed entirely of charter schools, in which public money follows each pupil to the school of his choice, would be no less a public school system than the monopoly system that so badly educates urban children today.

Recent developments underscore how strongly the public school monopoly is besieged. On June 9, investment banker Theodore Forstmann, Wal-Mart director John Walton, and several other wealthy philanthropists announced a $200 million national fund for 50,000 private school scholarships—that is, vouchers—for low-income students. The next day, the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled that Milwaukee's school choice program was constitutional and that it could provide 15,000 publicly funded vouchers for pupils to use in religious or secular private schools—a huge victory for school choice supporters. And on June 15 came the news that Arthur Levine, president of Columbia's Teachers College—the Mother Church of the public school status quo—backed vouchers, as long as they weren't used for religious schools. All this means that, within a year or two, at least an additional 65,000 children, and probably many more, will be able to opt out of poor public schools across the country, and the demand for more choice will grow.

The tide is turning for how we think about public education. For the moment, the public school monopoly has successfully persuaded the New York Legislature to resist the current of modernity, but it's only a matter of time before even New York gets swept along. A charter school law soon seems all but inevitable—and that's likely not to be the most radical reform in store. •

Research for this article was supported by the Brunie Fund for New York Journalism.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Do Drugs Courts Really Work?

Sally Satel

Drug courts offer criminal addicts a choice: either enter and complete treatment or go to jail. Here's why they've sparked such enthusiasm.

Arrested last March for selling crack, Brooklyn's Damon Fuseyamore expected the trial judge to sentence him to probation, like all his drug-selling friends. This time, though, the deal was different: two to seven in the slammer—it was Fuseyamore's fourth drug-related arrest—or else enter New York City's newest diversionary program for drug offenders, the drug court. After spending five unpleasant days in the Brooklyn House of Detention, the 35-year-old addict, terrified at the prospect of doing real time, leaped at the chance to avoid it. He took the drug court option. Well over a year later, he's clean—neither selling nor using.

Drug courts are the latest weapon against drug-related crime, and the results so far look promising. These courts zero in on the criminal's addiction, since more often than not it's an ongoing habit that drags such offenders back to crime. According to the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics, drug abusers tend to become repeat offenders more frequently than any other class of criminal: two-thirds of parolees who commit further crimes use or possess drugs while out on parole. And about one-quarter of the nation's 1.6 million state prisoners and a whopping 60 percent of its more than 100,000 federal prisoners are in jail for violating drug laws.

Drug courts seek to break this chain by offering nonviolent criminal addicts like Fuseyamore a bargain: if he pleads guilty and enters a treatment program, closely overseen by the drug court judge, the court drops the charges against him upon completion. If he backslides before "graduation," though, it's off to jail.

Drug courts are catching on: 275 are up and running in every state except Rhode Island, and communities across the country plan at least as many more. As of last spring, these courts had enrolled approximately 90,000 individuals—all since 1989, when Miami launched the first such program. California, with nearly a quarter of its state prisoners serving time for drug offenses, has the most drug courts, at 75; New York City so far has just one—the Brooklyn Treatment Court (BTC)—though three more will open soon, in Manhattan, Queens, and the Bronx. Operating out of the featureless and antiseptic Supreme Court building on Adams Street, BTC opened in June 1996 and now supervises 560 offenders, making it larger than the average drug court. It sees 40 to 60 new cases per day and admits a third of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

them into the program. The rest get processed through the judicial system as usual.

While conclusive data don't yet exist to proclaim drug courts a definitive success, the positive early indicators have fueled nearly universal enthusiasm in police, psychiatrists, the U.S. Department of Justice, and even President Clinton. The numbers from pioneering Miami illustrate why. As drug-related arrests flooded courtrooms and overwhelmed jail space in South Florida during the crack-cocaine epidemic of the mid-eighties, frustrated policemen found themselves re-arresting addicts out on probation again and again, mostly for new drug crimes. Miami's new program quickly enrolled 4,500 in drug court treatment programs, with a better-than-expected outcome: graduates had an 11 percent recidivism rate one year after release, way below the typical rate of 60 percent.

Other data suggest that Miami's heartening experience was no anomaly. In a recent report, covering 128 drug courts in 39 states, the General Accounting Office found that, on average, 71 percent of participants have completed or remain enrolled in drug court programs, a retention rate far superior to that for non-criminal addicts in public-sector treatment programs. In those often ineffectual programs, between 80 and 90 percent of enrollees drop out before completing treatment. Since therapists consider the criminal addict the most difficult to treat in conventional therapeutic settings, the high level of compliance appears all the more impressive. Even drug court dropouts benefit from their stay: according to Bureau of Justice Statistics data, after one year, police have rearrested just 28 percent of program dropouts who have returned to the community, a meaningful 12 percentage points lower than the rate for traditionally adjudicated criminal addicts.

It's easy to see why drug courts would be effective. They combine three important elements that no diversionary program has brought together before: coercion to force offenders into treatment, the judge's active presence through the whole course, and the lightning speed of adjudication and entry into treatment. As several large-scale studies show, coercion works: forcing an addict to get treatment can help him, often even to a greater degree than if he had voluntarily sought treatment. Contrary to conventional psychiatric wisdom, addicts needn't want to change their lives—at least not at first—for a treatment program to succeed. Moreover, with the fear of doing time hanging over his head, a drug abuser is more likely to stay in and finish treatment. The longer he stays, the better his chances of turning his life around.

THE GRANGER COLLECTION

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

An old scourge: New Yorkers frequent an opium den in 1881.

As the accounts of drug court participants repeatedly emphasize, the threat of jail can certainly concentrate the offender's mind. A 21-year-old woman, after the New Haven drug court punished her with jail time for a drug relapse, revealingly wrote in a court-assigned essay, "I was very scared of jail. The people in there are rough and that's not who I am. . . . My mother told me, 'thank God you got locked up when you did because two days ago a 20-year-old girl died in the house you were just getting high at.' . . . I realized for the first time in my life that I was being given a chance at life and I made a decision to take it." Jace Rivera, a 22-year-old former crack abuser who just graduated from the BTC program, tells a similar tale: "I didn't want to stop, but I kept thinking about jail." At first, he adds, "the threat of going to jail kept me straight." Now, drug free, Rivera works as a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stock boy in a Queens clothing store and has gone back to his wife and kids.

Roberta Glick, a 37-year-old former addict who used to sell magazine advertising and is now enrolled in BTC, is equally clear about the role that fear of jail played in reforming her. Two years ago, after she had begun to deal drugs to maintain her $300-a-day heroin habit, she was arrested three times in four months. After the first two arrests, she says, "I came to court and then would leave to get high." After the third arrest, spiraling downward, she wound up in jail. "That's where I hit bottom," she recounts. "I was sick, vomiting—I had completely lost my dignity. I hated it, but now I see it as a blessing, because they gave me the choice of the drug court. Anything to avoid jail."

But though Glick's original motivation was just staying out of jail, after six months in coerced therapy, she awoke to the fact that she "liked being clean. . . . I could think again, I started reading again, and I was free." Last March, Glick, admittedly not a typical drug court client, finished her residential therapy program at the Addict's Rehabilitation Center at Madison Avenue and 128th Street in Manhattan. "Here I am, a white Jewish woman at this black Christian program, but it's worked out very well," she told me. Now, drug free, she plans to go back to school for computing, and currently works full-time as a caterer.

The most original feature of drug court is the judge's active participation in the patient's treatment, which brings to bear his considerable symbolic authority. The judge's involvement refines drug court's coercive edge through the instantaneous graduated punishments he can mete out. Prior to the emergence of drug courts, a judge who recommended drug treatment as a condition of sentencing would refer the offender to a treatment program and then see him once or twice again, if ever. Today, during regularly scheduled courtroom hearings, the judge holds the defendant publicly accountable for his progress. Technically, a mere magistrate could do the judge's work, but the powerful effect of the judicial black robe on the offender "can't be underestimated," according to Jeffrey Tauber, a former judge who presided over Oakland's drug court and who now serves as president of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals. "It shows defendants that we take this process seriously," he says.

An involved judge serves as an authority figure from whom drug court participants seek approval—as if he were a parent—providing the attention, dependable if stern, that many addicts, coming from chaotic backgrounds and broken homes, seem to crave. Ijumaa Washington, a former crack addict nearing graduation from BTC, offers typical testimony. Before drug court, she says, "I was selling my body to get the money for crack, getting free condoms from the Lifestyles truck that came every Wednesday." Now she has earned her high school equivalency diploma, is finishing computer training, and has been free of drugs for 18 months, a dramatic turnaround that she believes had a lot to do with the judge's concern. "I can't tell you how good it makes me feel to have a judge take interest in me," she says. "I feel proud and grateful for being given this chance." She is not alone in her sentiments: a remarkable 80 percent of drug court participants say that they would have left the program if not for the judge's presence.

Drug court's emphasis on graduated punishment is another crucial difference from traditional court-mandated treatment programs, which typically ignore the first dirty urine or two but with the next one toss the accused in jail to serve his deferred sentence. This tendency to ignore lapses and then to come down hard is a notoriously poor way to secure patient compliance. With the drug courts, by contrast, the judge meets the offender's every dirty urine or missed appointment with punishment that escalates if the infractions continue. Counting an offender's infractions over the previous month, a drug court judge can impose anything from more intensive treatment to 20 days in jail to expulsion from the program and a full jail or prison sentence. The judge also rewards good behavior. A participant who behaves well for four months, say, might progress to the next phase of the treatment program and see his urine tests grow less frequent. Drug court's graduated but regular response to infractions drives home to the offender that his actions mean something and that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he controls his fate, key elements in learning moral responsibility.

Drug court's third advantage is that it processes defendants speedily—which can change an offender's behavior, as political scientist James Q. Wilson argues, because swift justice links crime and punishment together in the offender's (often unsubtle) mind (see "Making Justice Swifter," Autumn 1997). In half the existing drug courts, less than a week passes between arrest and the offender's first appearance in court; in the other half, the wait is never more than a month. His entry into treatment is equally brisk: two-thirds of defendants begin treatment within three days after their first appearance before the judge.

Damon Fuseyamore's rapid trajectory through the Brooklyn Treatment Court exemplifies the drug court system's speed. After his arrest, Fuseyamore stood before Judge Jo Ann Ferdinand the very next day. By then, the treatment staff had tested him for drugs, interviewed him about the severity of his addiction, and devised a treatment plan for him if he pleaded guilty and agreed to enter the drug court program. Judge Ferdinand explained to him that if he completed the program successfully—typically a 12- to 18-month process—she would dismiss the charges against him. Like nine out of ten defendants that BTC offers to treat, Fuseyamore took the drug court option. At first, he complied with the drug court program by rote, without inner commitment. "I admit, I wanted the charges dropped," he says. "I also knew I'd go to prison if I bolted."

Entering a residential treatment program in Williamsburg called, coincidentally, Damon House, his first task was to kick the crack habit. But stopping was only the beginning of his therapy. After 15 months in treatment, Fuseyamore can now take classes, and since January he's been studying auto mechanics in a city-run vocational program—to "brush up on my skills," he says. At present, he's working part-time for a private bus company as a mechanic. To graduate from drug court this coming September, though, he's got to do more than take classes: he must continue to participate in counseling and learn the skills that will prevent him from relapsing, including how to spot what triggers his drug craving, and what he should do when that craving recurs.

Despite Fuseyamore's initial going-through-the-motions approach, BTC now considers him a successful participant. With clean urines and perfect attendance, he seems the model patient. But success did not come easily. Fuseyamore is the first to admit that initially he just submitted to the program out of fear: "This drug court isn't fooling around; they come after you if you go AWOL." Coercion came first, responsibility later. Several months into treatment, his attitude began to change. "I realized that it was time to get it together: I was 35, not getting any younger; I had a real mechanical skill; I knew I could be a decent member of society." After Fuseyamore graduates from drug court in the fall, and once he has found a regular job and saved $2,000, he'll leave Damon House, though he'll return weekly for six months as part of an aftercare program.

THE GRANGER COLLECTION

A San Francisco opium den, 1897

Every participant's goal is to graduate, and on October 29, 1997, Judge Ferdinand presided over BTC's first graduation ceremony, moved to a larger courtroom to accommodate the overflowing

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

crowd. Ferdinand praised the dozen men and women who, a year or so earlier, had stood before her to plead guilty to a felony. "We saw them arrive in handcuffs, but now we're here to celebrate their wonderful accomplishment," the beaming judge observed, nodding toward the jury box where the graduates sat, on the threshold of renewed citizenship. All 12 of the graduates now worked or attended school. All had done the required community service and earned the required high school equivalency certificate, if they lacked a high school diploma. Parents, friends, and dignitaries watched the ceremony, at the end of which the court dismissed all charges against the proud grads. Since last October, BTC has graduated 66 participants, and its retention rate is a healthy 72 percent.

Drug court treatment is much cheaper than jail ($2,200 per participant per year, at most, compared with $22,000 per year).

A word of caution: "The data are not yet available to indicate whether the drug court phenomenon as it has been variously implemented is an adjudication fad or provides, at least in some areas, the elements of a substantive intervention," says M. Douglas Anglin, director of UCLA's Drug Abuse Research Center. A recent report from the General Accounting Office concurs, finding existing evidence "insufficient to draw any firm conclusions on the overall impact of drug court programs." Nor do the data exist to determine whether some drug court regimens work better than others. No one has analyzed how differences in sanction schedules, length and method of treatment, graduation requirements, and so on affect drug court outcomes. Currently only one court in six collects follow-up data on program participants after graduation, a deficiency that cries out for correction.

Encouragingly, the Brooklyn district attorney's office, seeking to determine whether the Brooklyn Treatment Court is really a good idea, plans to divide the borough into five zones, with only three of the zones referring cases to BTC. The D.A. will then compare the re-arrest and relapse rates in the two business-as-usual zones with those in the three drug court zones. Meaningful data should be available within two years.

At present, too, no one knows for sure if drug courts are cost-effective. They appear to be. Because they act swiftly, they don't waste money in lengthy court proceedings. And keeping someone in drug court treatment is much cheaper than keeping him in jail ($2,200 per participant per year, at most, compared with $22,000 per year). Moreover, after jail, probationers resume using drugs and committing crimes at higher rates than drug court grads, imposing further costs on the community. Still, because drug courts require a dedicated judge, prosecutor, and defense attorney, along with funds for treatment and computers for tracking participants, start-up costs can run high, prohibitively so in some smaller locales. As Barry Mahoney, director of Denver's Justice Management Institute, warns, "If we can't document the savings to society and figure them into budget negotiations, it will be difficult to sustain drug court funding." Drug court advocates should lose no time in gathering the requisite data.

Drug court supporters should also make sure that the courts steer clear of poor—or fraudulent—treatment providers. Abuses have already occurred: in 1995, a network news program exposed serious flaws in the Miami drug court, including incompetent staff, rampant drug use at treatment centers, and risibly short stays in treatment. Overwhelmed by ever-accelerating drug-related arrests, Miami's drug court had too hastily contracted with unlicensed "treatment providers" that turned out to be little more than crack houses. The court has since corrected this disastrous problem, which highlights the potential for trouble. More recently, Baltimore's drug court has come under fire for shoddy information maintenance and lapses in supervision.

Drug courts should carefully choose licensed treatment providers with proven track records. For hard-core addicts, in particular, that ideally means therapeutic communities, like New York's Phoenix

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

House, which succeed by showing the addict that he is the true source of his addiction. By placing the hard-core drug abuser in a setting of mutual assistance, where residents and staff (many of them former addicts themselves) enforce community rules, encourage individual responsibility, and watch out for one another, these communities often effectively transform the addict's self-destructive behavior.

Another promising therapy is "moral reconation," which picks apart the addict's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, forcing him to take greater responsibility for his condition. Both these therapies try to turn the participant into a morally responsible agent, whose addiction is not a disease afflicting him from without but rather the direct result of previous choices he has made—choices he can now reject. In a culture awash in therapies that deny we're to blame for anything, from gluttony to adultery, it shouldn't be surprising that these refreshingly old-fashioned tough-love treatments actually work.

Toward the more newfangled end of the spectrum of therapeutic approaches to combat addictions are providers who offer acupuncture. Even this treatment, perhaps because the quiet acupuncture sessions create an oasis of order in chaotic lives, seems to get worthwhile results, though hard data are lacking. But since the field of drug treatment is filled with fad and sometimes even folly and fraud, drug courts will have to proceed very carefully, scrupulously monitoring outcomes at every step.

One final concern: the judge's heavy involvement in the drug court carries with it a serious danger. A judge who acts as "father, psychiatrist, and priest," in the words of Judge Jorge Lopez—until recently the charismatic director of District of Columbia's drug court—risks surrendering his judicial authority, like parents who strive to be pals to their children. Judges also run the danger of naiveté about the nature of addiction. "When a judge gets into the buddy-advocate role, he can be reluctant to impose sanctions," says a case manager at the Brooklyn Treatment Court. "Also, believe it or not, I've seen judges underestimate how manipulative addicts are and get tricked into being too lenient." A judge who confuses his role with that of a therapist surrenders exactly what makes him so effective in the drug court program: his authoritative presence as a judge. As drug court participants themselves report, it is not the caring arm around the shoulder but rather the majesty of the judge's office—representing the full weight of society's moral judgment and the power to throw the addict in jail within hours—that works its salutary influence. To have such an important and serious figure concern himself with my life, the addict thinks, my actions must mean something, so I shouldn't disappoint him. Drug court judges need to be crystal clear about where their true responsibility lies, and it's not in switching places with the therapist. Though it dances with the therapeutic, drug court must remain, first and foremost, a court.

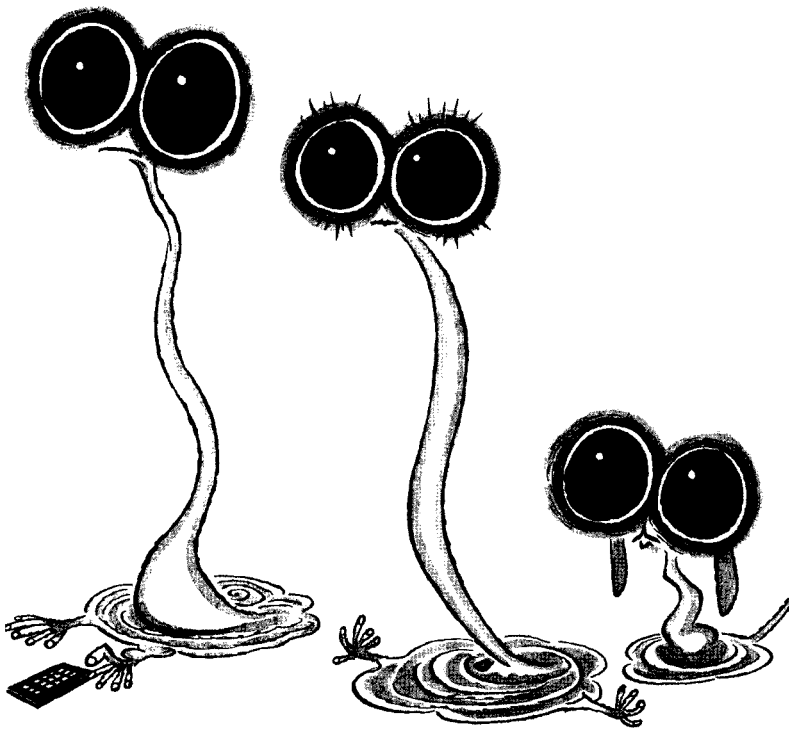
If drug courts ultimately make good on all this early promise, they will solve another problem along the way: they will free up prison space for the really bad guys. A recent Harvard Medical School study reveals that nearly half the drug offenders serving time in Massachusetts state prisons have no record of violent crime. Research by the Manhattan Institute's John DiIulio Jr. shows that a quarter of all new inmates in New York are drug offenders never charged with any other type of crime. Many, including DiIulio, find it absurd that nonviolent drug offenders are locked away for terms almost as long as those of murderers, rapists, and robbers, overcrowding limited prison space. If drug courts can empty out prisons without filling the streets with criminals, that would be a worthwhile contribution in itself.

But the biggest contribution of all would be to solve what always seemed insoluble: rehabilitating addicts before they become hardened criminals—and in a cost-effective way. To be sure, newfangled enthusiasms periodically run through the therapeutic and criminal justice professions, claiming to have found just such a philosopher's stone. So sober caution is in order. We must ask all the tough questions about drug courts: Do they really reduce crime? By how much? Do they help cure addiction? What's the relapse rate? Do they save money? Can we prevent abuses? If, at long last, the early indications hold up, then drug courts will prove a minor miracle.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pulling the Plug

Harry Stein



One July day a few years ago, my ten-year-old son Charlie and I boarded the early morning train at London's Paddington Station, heading for Bath. The weather was glorious, the passing countryside—*Persuasion* country—astonishingly lush, and alone with my little boy I was wholly at peace. When he began to sing softly, I knew he felt the same way.

Then I heard the words:

> *Seven-Up, it's an up thing,*
> *Seven-Up does it every time,*
> *Yeah, Seven-Up, it's an up thing,*
> *It's clear and it's wonderful and it's totally fine.*

I could say this was a pivotal moment, the instant I finally realized we had to do something about the impact of TV on the life of our family. But that would be stretching the point. The fact is, my wife and I had never deluded ourselves as to the pernicious effects of the 24-inch appliance in our bedroom. Despite the fact that the most often cited statistic on children and TV—a mind-boggling 28 hours watched per week on average—had never remotely applied in our home, we knew full well the hold it had on the kids, and especially our son; how, given the choice, he'd watch almost anything rather than pick up a book or even go out and play on a sunny day. And, too, how often the complaint would come as soon as the set was off: "I'm bored. What should I do?"

A couple of decades ago, well before I became a father, I had a conversation with an ex-professor of mine about her high-school-senior son—a thoughtful and independent-minded young man who, on his downtime, was working as a jazz pianist. How did it happen? I asked her; how did she and her husband produce such an interesting kid? "He always knew how to be alone," she replied simply. Though for brains, energy, and utter charm our Charlie stacked up with anyone, this was a skill he hadn't even started to learn.

More than that—far more—as the kids grew older we had increasingly serious concerns with much of TV's content, from the witless sexual double-entendres that pass as humor on the sitcoms in "family hour" to the soul-deadening hucksterism to the ideological biases of everyone from Oprah Winfrey to Mike Wallace.

As one friend, who helps run a highly selective nursery program at a local college, puts it, "Everyone agrees about TV in principle. Our parents have to fill out a form on how much and what kinds of TV their kids watch, and the answer's always 'very little' and '*Sesame Street*.'

Illustrations by Arnold Roth

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Well, I can tell you, I hear lots more being discussed than just *Sesame Street*."

For her, as for many preschool teachers, the tube's impact on attention span and creativity is highly disturbing. "Rather than inventing games, they'll just play out the same story from TV or the movies over and over again, not even adding their own twists. And it's always whatever's hot—there's already a lack of critical thinking."

Notes her husband, himself a third-grade teacher at a New York private school, "I get them five years later." He tells of a kid recently mentioning an especially violent cartoon he'd seen that morning. "It turns out that 75 percent of the class had seen it before they came to school. *My* day starts with brushing my teeth and eating breakfast; most of *them* are doing *this*."

"I'm a Brownie leader," a neighbor of mine tells me, "and when I try to read *The Lorax*, they all yell, 'Let's *watch* it!' What's the world coming to, when a bunch of seven-year-olds won't sit still for Dr. Seuss?"

"It's hard enough raising children without TV imposing on them a completely distorted notion of what's appropriate and normal," adds a friend in southern California. "And I don't just mean Jerry Springer, which is one step away from public executions, or the circus of misery on the other talk shows. How about the news? My 12-year-old daughter tells me a couple of her friends actually watched that guy blow his brains out on live TV!"

Indeed, after the countless studies and reports documenting the negative impact of excessive TV on kids, to claim ignorance on the subject is nearly as specious as making the equivalent claim about cigarettes and lung cancer. In America today, TV has become a middlebrow version of the weather. Liberals tirelessly complain about the violence, conservatives about the sleaze; everyone about how it makes kids lazier, more passive, duller. But in almost every home, the problem is what to do about it.

In a sense, this is an odd dilemma, since the solution is so seemingly obvious. Yet in fact, for most of us parents the prospect of pulling the plug gives rise instantly to a whole new set of questions and doubts: What about all the good stuff on TV? Won't going cold turkey cut off kids from the social mainstream? Anyway, aren't such measures . . . *draconian*?

Then, too, usually unstated but often underlying all the rest, there's this: What about us? For not only have we come to rely on the box for cut-rate babysitting; we're inveterate viewers ourselves and are nearly as comfortable with the television as the center of family life as are the kids.

I don't mean to belittle this. I understand. In fact, in our family, I've always been the grown-up with the TV problem. Among my earliest memories is eating dinner in a high chair before *Howdy Doody*, and, though "addiction" may be too strong a word, from *Leave It to Beaver* and the Beatles on *Ed Sullivan* on through *Saturday Night Live*, I'd fully shared our generation's small screen bonding experience. My wife, on the other hand, grew up in one of those eccentric academic families that routinely referred to the TV as "the idiot box." That's why, even in middle age, I could happily veg out for hours on end, remote in hand, while her viewing was largely confined to the egghead ghettos of C-Span and Sunday morning political shows.

Besides, I had a professional rationale for my TV watching. At the time, I happened to be writing a column for, of all places, *TV Guide*, on the (seemingly worthy) topic of television's impact on the culture. Since I had to watch, wouldn't denying the kids access to the tube be the rankest hypocrisy?

Never mind that much of what I ran across in my work merely confirmed the obvious: that as a baby-sitter, TV has a lot more in common with Madonna than with Mary Poppins. Or, as the psychologist David Elkind so memorably put it in *The Hurried Child*, his classic on the obliteration of innocence, thanks largely to TV, "children today know much more than they understand."

Obviously, out in TV-land, this is not something people lose

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

much sleep over. Reporting a *TV Guide* piece on the attitudes and values of the creators of some of the most popular programs for children, I found that most of my interviewees were proud of what they took to be their shows' hipness and sophistication. "Kids are no longer naive," as Tom Miller, co-creator of *Full House*, put it, explaining why his program, which at the time was top rated nationally among 2- to 11-year-olds, so often played compromising sexual situations for laughs; "and if what you put on doesn't reflect that, they're gonna say, 'Who are these people? They're geeks!'" Don Reo, creator of NBC's *Blossom*, explained his show's concentration on such issues as drug abuse and teen sexuality by making an appeal to family values that deserves an Emmy for tendentiousness. "My father and I had so little common ground that we had almost no basis for emotional connection," he said. "That isn't true now. We children of the sixties who now have children of our own are far less 'parental.' We can relate—because we have rock 'n' roll in common."

As put off by TV's pervasive coarseness and low-mindedness as many parents are, my wife and I initially resorted to the usual solution: we set limits; we dictated conditions. We allotted each of our two children one and a half hours of TV watching during the week, plus two more on weekends—their choices but, to the extent full monitoring was humanly possible, subject to parental veto.

To be sure, this system was something of an improvement over the *laissez-faire* chaos of previous years, a period too frequently marked by bickering over who got to watch what or by flaring anger when we ordered someone to shut the damn thing off. But it ended up creating a new kind of ongoing debate, especially with our son—who, showing unexpected accounting prowess, was forever counting minutes, insisting he was owed 18 here or 43 there—and we soon adopted a new plan. Now, we agreed, we would watch a select handful of shows each week as a family—*Frasier*, *The Simpsons*, *Seinfeld*, plus whatever intriguing documentaries or special events (the Olympics, an historical special, the World Series) happened along.

As an intellectual proposition, this seemed to make good sense. I had written, and still believe, that notwithstanding all the junk polluting the airwaves, this is TV's true golden age. Not only do cable outlets like the History Channel, A&E, and the Learning Channel offer a range of quality programming, but the smartest of networks' character-driven dramas and sitcoms are vastly superior to most of the fare available on movie screens at $7.50 per ticket.

Yet even in this there was a large element of self-justification. What eventually became inescapable, sitting there with a 14- and an 11-year-old, was that even the shows we liked contained elements that made us acutely uncomfortable. Over a year and a half of watching *Seinfeld* as a family, there must have been a dozen times when—with the talk turning back to masturbation or someone's sexual performance, or with Jerry about to bed yet another young woman—my wife and I would announce "Inappropriate," and the kids would know to get up and leave the room.

I have no doubt that lots of people we know would have regarded this little moral fire drill as silly; almost all our kids' friends watched *Seinfeld*, presumably without interruption. Frankly, we felt a little silly ourselves—but more than that, we were annoyed the problem presented itself at all. Granted, times change, and the show is aimed at mature audiences; but then, so was *The Dick Van Dyke Show* when my brothers and I were my kids' age, and my parents never had to worry about shooing us from the room.

Indeed, even when the content is benign, such shows offer a worldview that is the polar opposite of innocent. As winning as my wife and I find the *Seinfeld* bunch, their bemused cynicism—about life in general and relationships in particular—was hardly something we wanted our kids to emulate. Nor, for that matter, to cite another brilliantly crafted show, is Bart Simpson a much better role model, with his laser-quick putdowns of his moronic dad.

Of course, since *The Simpsons*, other animated shows have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dispensed with even the pretense of responsibility, picking up vast kid audiences by moving into the realm of the frankly perverse. *Ren and Stimpy* begat *Beavis and Butthead*, which begat *South Park*. You know, the one with the fart jokes and the Christmas Poo, where little Kenny suffers a gruesome death at the end of every episode.

Shortly after *South Park*'s debut, our son Charlie, now 13, caught it at a friend's house and, no fool he, pitched it to his mother and me in the terms most likely to elicit the desired result. "You'll like it," he said; "it's really anti-p.c."

A few nights later we watched an episode, and he was right: it was. But then, how could it not be? This show is anti-*everything*: sometimes funny, yes—but a sustained assault on good taste and what used to be thought of as common decency, probably as nihilistic a regular half-hour as any ever aired. Not so incidentally—for it shows how increasingly isolated those of us who worry about such things are—*Newsweek* recently celebrated *South Park* on its cover for being *especially* subversive, pushing the envelope even *further*. The article responds directly to those who fret about the show's impact on their children with a sneering, "keeping kids innocent is like squeezing toothpaste back into the tube."

Our own brush with *South Park* was no more the precipitating cause of our next decision than that train ride to Bath; but both surely figured in it, along with a hundred other such episodes and thousands of incidental moments. With my *TV Guide* stint done, I had no more handy excuses. Weary of the relentless intrusion of popular culture into

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

our home and our heads, fed up with the size of television's role in our family's life, we decided it was finally time just to be done with it.

We pulled the plug.

We could not pretend this command parental decision was completely fair. Our daughter Sadie was hardly the chronic TV abuser that her brother was; a big reader, she'd largely confined her viewing to the Food Channel and forties melodramas on American Movie Classics. Partly with this in mind—though mainly for the simple fun of it—we allowed one exception to the rule. Holding on to the Sony and the VCR, we instituted Friday Night at the Movies—a video of a classic film that each of us would select in turn. Aside from that, we were all in this together. And anyway, Sadie could at least take solace in the fact that I was suffering almost as much as Charlie.

When other adults heard what we were doing, we got two reactions. One was a mix of admiration and incredulity, a sort of: "Wow, we wish we could do that." But the other contained an undercurrent of annoyance, as if our decision were essentially for show or, more to the point, was an unwelcome challenge.

Our California friend, whose family ditched TV around the same time we did, reported the same thing. "Over and over I kept hearing, 'What about the Learning Channel or the History Channel or *Nova*?'" she says. "Sure—as if that's what their kids are watching, instead of *Sabrina, the Teenage Witch*." She pauses. "It sounds ugly, but the real issues here are selfishness and narcissism. With a lot of these parents, the attitude is: Me first, then you—if I have time."

The father of one of Charlie's friends, a (what else?) professor of communications, genially scoffed at us as Luddites, pointing out that every new technology has aroused scorn and apprehension at first. "An article appeared in *Good Housekeeping* in 1910 entitled 'Motion Pictures: A School for Criminals.' Socrates was against written as opposed to spoken language, claiming it would dull peoples' memories!"

But I more than once got another argument, partly defensive, to be sure, but also presented as a matter of principle—and only from liberals. Its essential premise is that, though much of TV is objectionable and some of it may even be damaging, it is *wrong* to impose our will and fuddy-duddy sensibilities on kids beyond, say, elementary school. To do so smacks of what many aging veterans of the sixties consider the ugliest of traits: authoritarianism. In fact, even attempting to monitor one's children's viewing habits manifests an unacceptable intrusion.

David Denby, the film and cultural critic, neatly summed up this position a couple of years ago in *The New Yorker*. He wrote that parents who play censor with their kids "are locked in an unwinnable struggle to shut out pop culture and the life of the streets. . . . These parents risk making the forbidden glamorous and dangerous; they risk cutting the children off from their friends and bringing them up as alienated strangers in the electronic world of the future."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And later, there's this, on parents he deems too rigid in enforcing standards: "Yet the issue is not so simple, especially for parents like me and my wife, who are not eager to stand over the children, guiding their progress all day long like missionaries leading savages to light. To assume control over their habits and attitudes, we would have to become bullies."

The self-congratulatory tone aside, the sheer gall is breathtaking. Watching the guy make virtues of hand-wringing and weak will, one is left wondering exactly what role parents like Denby and his wife do see for themselves. On the evidence, it would seem to be that of pal; or, more precisely—for let's try to be fair—pal/mentor; for surely Denby is always up for a good conversation with his kids about the schlock in which they immerse themselves, if only the kids would ask him.

But give him this: if he has surrendered unconditionally to the times, at least he has done so with eyes open and with some comforting highbrow rationales at hand. Most parents, when it comes to their kids and popular culture, simply tune out. Of all the data available on the subject, the following factoid, offered by a Washington-based group called TV-Free America, is perhaps most startling: 54 percent of American children have TVs in their *bedrooms*.

A spokesman for TV-Free America tells me that this past April more than 5 million people participated in the group's annual National TV-Turnoff Week. Frankly, that sounds pretty fishy—one certainly didn't hear much about its having any impact on the ratings—and one is led to hope maybe the TVs-in-bedrooms stat is off, too.

But I must say, many of the slew of testimonials the guy sent along from people recently released from TV's stranglehold did reflect our experience. There was a good deal of comment on how unexpectedly smooth the transition had been; on the greater attention to homework and on toys long unused suddenly reappearing, along with the Scrabble and chess boards; and over and over, on silence where once there was always background noise.

Also, no longer subject to TV's clock, one's life takes on a different, more personal rhythm; vastly less time gets wasted on what, finally, has always been inconsequential, even to oneself. Though, unable to help ourselves, my wife and I did sneak a Sunday morning peek at the egregious William Ginsburg, neither of us has yet laid eyes on a moving image of Ally McBeal or the Bride of Wildenstein.

Don't get me wrong: only a fool would claim the absence of TV alone is enough to make family life an idyll; ask Caligula or Eugene O'Neill. Around our place, we still bicker plenty; often someone's pouting; Charlie's still a reflexive wise guy. Just yesterday, apropos of this essay, I asked him if he missed TV.

"Of course," he said, not missing a beat; "it's all that held our family together."

But I'm not sure even he'd want to return to the way it was. Like me, he's reading more than ever, everything from Dickens to Ring Lardner, and he's back to drawing again, inventing logos and uniforms for imaginary teams. And one of the things we bicker about far less these days is homework.

More than that, scoff at it though he will, there's a unity to the family that I think none of us ever quite felt before. It's there in the dinner-table conversations that now sometimes extend well past 8 o'clock—into what was once only TV's alleged version of family hour; it's there during our glorious new weekly tradition, Friday Night at the Movies.

I was recently talking to our California friend about this, and she agreed it had been pretty much the same for them. "It definitely does change your perspective. I go to people's houses now and am immediately conscious of the TV—the multiple TVs—running all the time. Everyone's drawn to different corners of the house to watch—what? The latest car chase on the news? Cats and mice bopping each other over the head?" She paused. "And then these people will come to you with a straight face and describe TV as 'the electronic hearth.'"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

An Eloquent Sermon in Stone

David Watkin

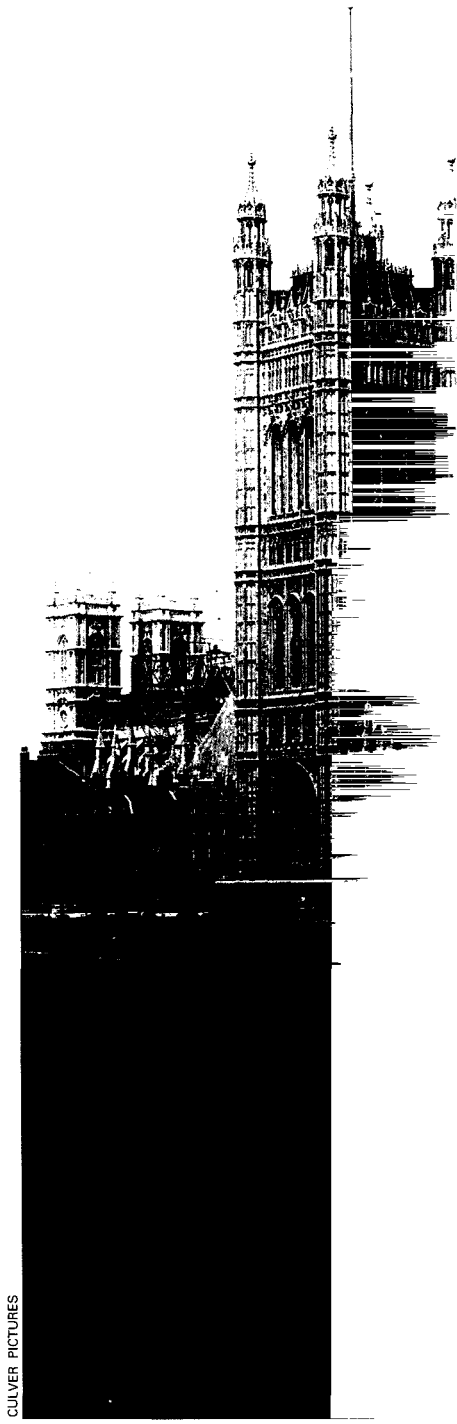
Architecture is more than mere engineering, aiming not just to make buildings stand up but to make them speak—and, at its best, to make them speak eloquently of profound matters. No public building exemplifies that power better than Sir Charles Barry's Houses of Parliament, whose architecture delivers virtually a sermon in stone to the British nation about its deepest values, its ancient culture, and the high standards to which it holds its governors. Barry and his extraordinary young coadjutor, Augustus Welby Pugin, deliberately conceived the New Palace of Westminster, as it is properly called, as a place where history and national myth would intertwine, inspire, and educate. Today, almost a century and a half after it first opened, the vast building is universally popular as a symbol of the strength and dignity of the nation, its famous chimes of Big Ben more successful than the national anthem at conveying a sense of identity to most of Her Majesty's subjects. This is a language that modern architecture, with its customary incivility and blankness, desperately needs to re-learn.

The New Palace's builders well understood what they were doing and recognized that it was important enough to justify the spending of money on a giant scale, more than had ever been spent on a building in England hitherto. Their first decision, following the spectacular destruction by fire of the old Palace of Westminster on the night of October 16, 1834, sounded the keynote of the project's effort to educate and moralize: like its Gothic predecessor, the new building would also be "adapted to the Gothic origin and time-worn buttresses of our constitution from a time when classic architecture was unknown in this country." Its decorative paintings and sculpture would celebrate the nineteenth-century belief that England had reconciled the differences between Catholics and Protestants, between Roundheads and Cavaliers, monarchy and democracy, peers and people, to produce

A land of settled government . . .
Where Freedom slowly
broadens down
From precedent to precedent.

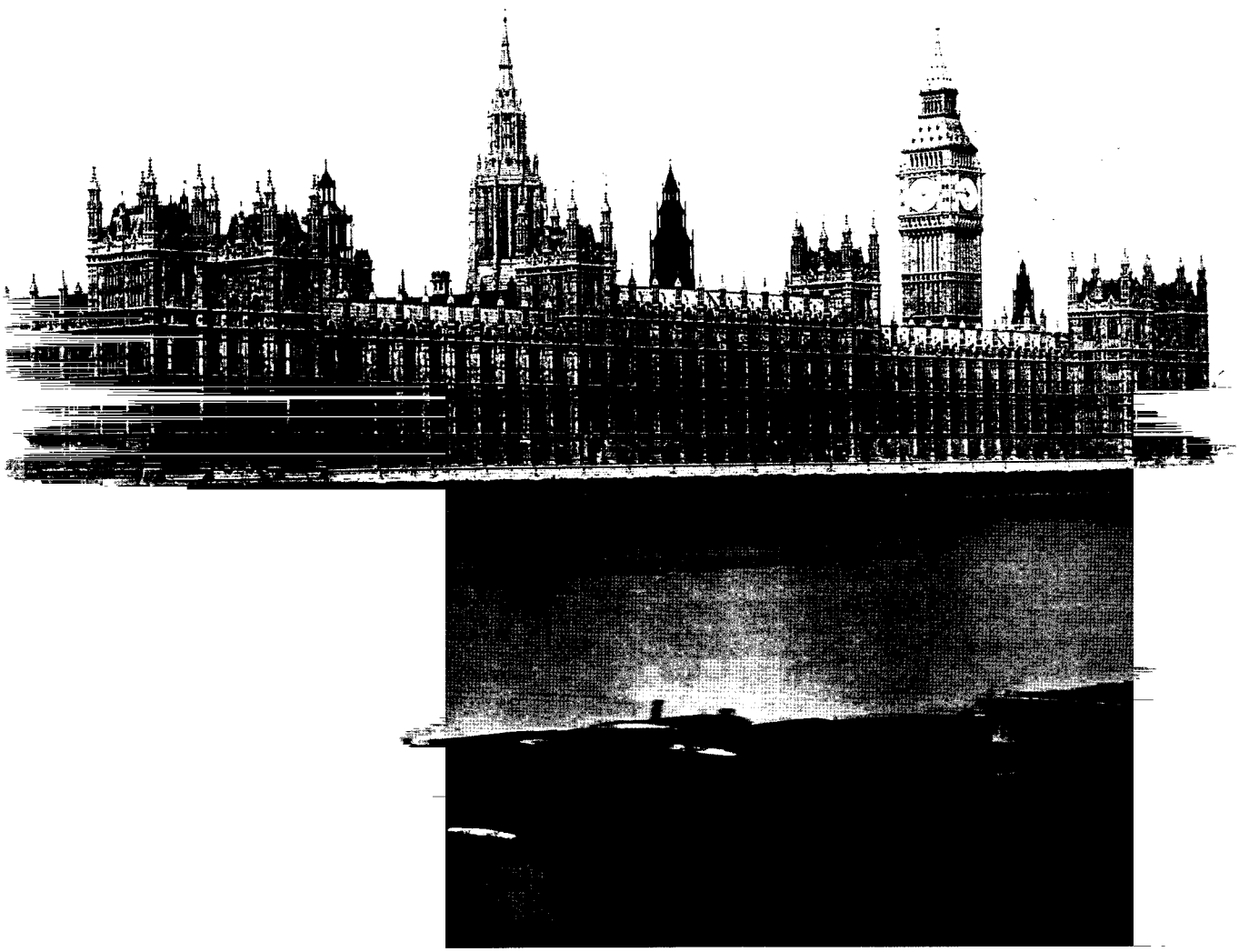
Contemporaries saw the Houses of Parliament as "the initial letter in the chapter of our architectural history which the age has been composing." It is, indeed, the first great Victorian building and in many ways the first great modern building. As architecture, and as a monument to the nation's aspirations and ideals, who can say that it has not triumphantly achieved its objectives?

Its promoters recognized that the new building would have a lot of history to reflect. From the eleventh century, the Palace of Westminster had been the principal residence of the medieval kings. By the thirteenth century, the taste for a decorative scheme freighted with ideals that characterized Barry's building six centuries later had already begun to form. Henry III, who



CULVER PICTURES

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

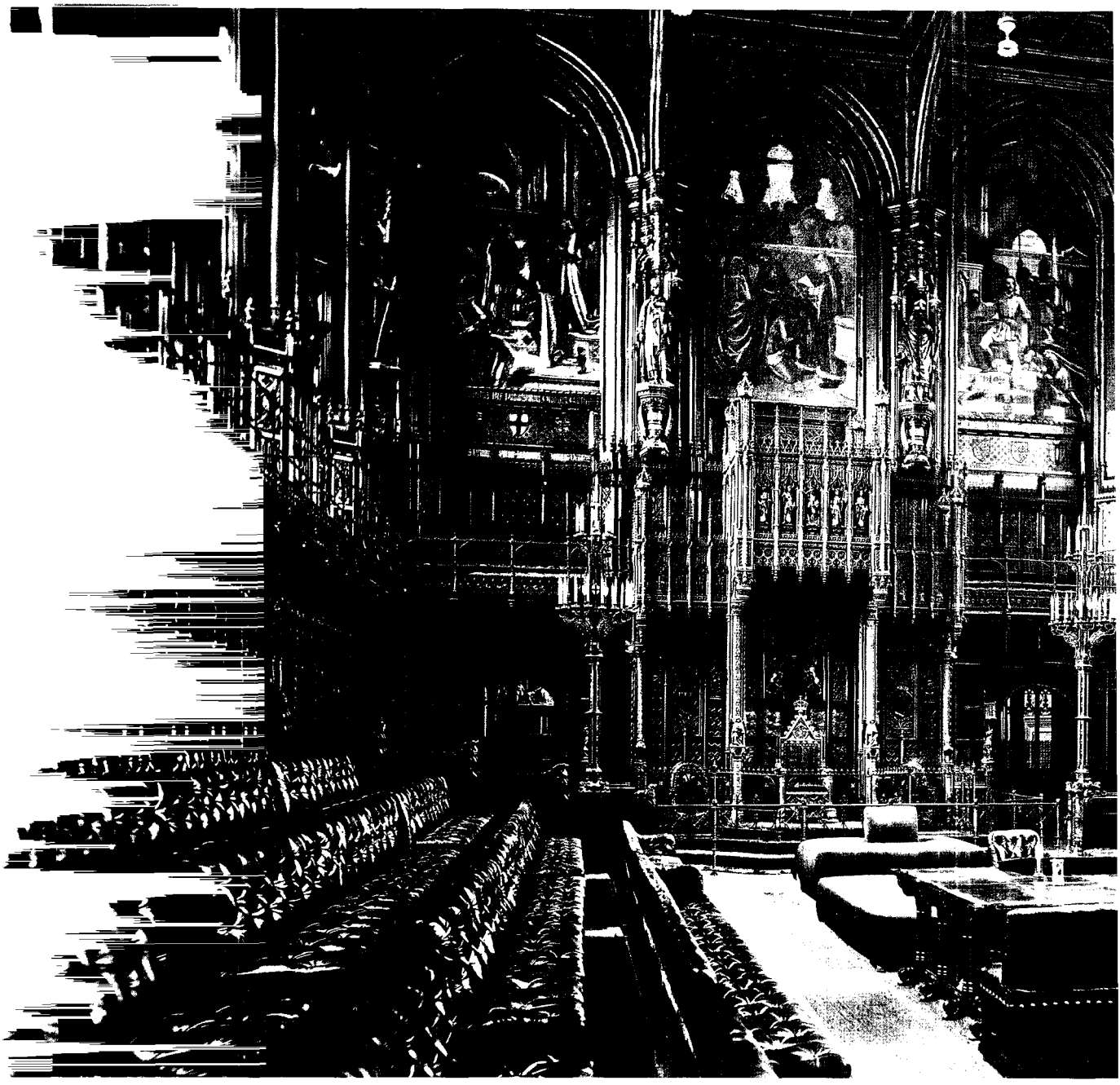


Architect Barry intended the Houses of Parliament as a "sculptured memorial of our national history."

had built Westminster Abbey, had a room known as the Painted Chamber decorated with hortatory scenes of the Coronation of King (and Saint) Edward the Confessor and of the Triumphant Virtues. Later in the century, Edward III, the crusader king, added an immense cycle of Old Testament scenes celebrating Judas Maccabaeus as an heroic commander, who, like Joshua or King David, set a biblical example of the knightly behavior that should mark a leader.

It was at the Palace of Westminster that the earliest recorded parliaments, simply the king meeting his coun-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



The paintings in the House of Lords depict the virtues that should guide a government.

selors, took place By the fourteenth century, the House of Commons, born when Simon de Montfort summoned the first shire representatives in 1265, had become a distinct and separate assembly, its members meeting in the Chapter House of Westminster Abbey, just west of the palace. But in 1547, long after King Henry VIII had moved the royal residence to Whitehall Palace, it moved into the palace itself, into St. Stephen's Chapel, whose seats facing each other, originally designed for priests singing antiphonally, encouraged the growth of a two-party parliament of government and opposition. The Lords met first in the Painted Chamber and eventually in the White Hall, which remained their home until the fire of 1834. Nearby, in Westminster Hall, almost the only part of the medieval palace that survives today, the three courts of King's Bench, Common Pleas, and Chancery sat until 1825.

A century before the great fire, members of Parliament began to itch to modernize their by then ancient, inconvenient, and decaying quarters, and three great architects, William Kent, Sir John Soane, and James

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

UPI/CORBIS-BETTMANN

Urbanities

Wyatt produced ambitious plans, none of them ever built. Though Kent and Soane favored classical styles, during the Napoleonic Wars a consensus formed that the Gothic, or "Saxon," style was the appropriate national style, in harmony with the liberty that was the basis of England's constitution and the rights of freeborn Englishmen. Antiquarian John Carter promoted Gothic as a bulwark against Napoleon and revolution, claiming that "The admiration of Roman and Grecian styles has turned the genius of Englishmen from their national architecture to toil in an inglorious and servile pursuit to imitate a foreign manner." He went on to explain that, "in a day like the present, when the infernal dispensers of 'liberty and equality' are spreading their destroying power on so many Realms . . . it behooves every Englishman to come forward in the general cause, to protect his King and Country"—which meant building in their nation's ancient Gothic style.

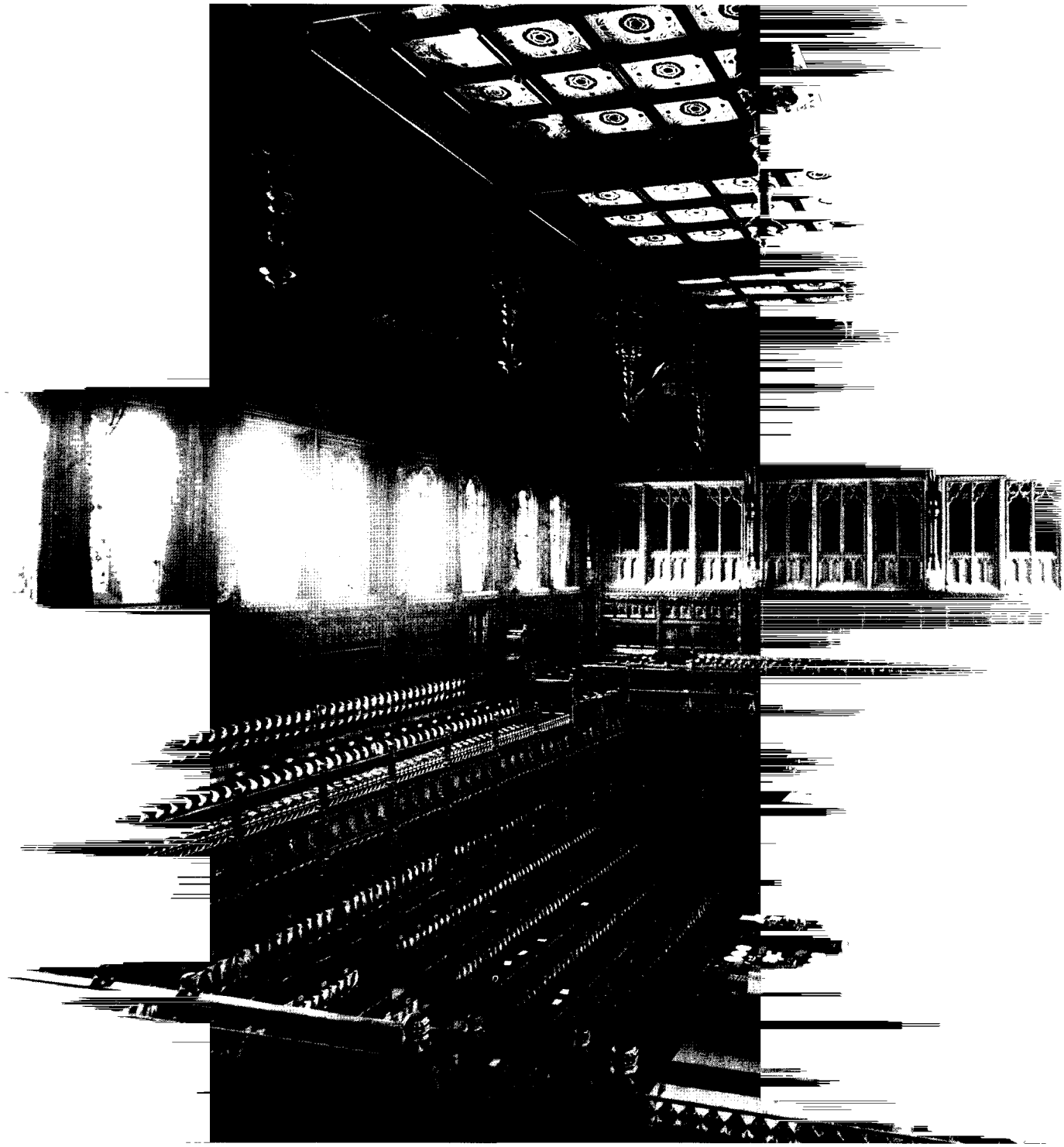
The destruction of the Palace of Westminster provided the country with its greatest architectural opportunity since the Great Fire of London in 1664. The committee that William IV appointed to consider the replacement of the old buildings announced in June 1835 that it would choose the architect by "general competition" and that "the style of the buildings [would] be either Gothic or Elizabethan." Ninety-seven architects submitted entries, accompanied by some 1,400 drawings. In January 1836 the committee announced that the winner was Charles Barry.

At the time of the competition, Barry was 40 and had designed Gothic churches and schools, as well as the Travellers' Club, built in the Italianate classical style he would initially have preferred to use for the Palace of Westminster. Born into modest middle-class circumstances as the son of a stationer in Westminster, he had set his sights high, professionally and socially. And he achieved his ambitions. He used a small legacy from his father to travel on the Continent and study architecture in Europe and the Near East between 1817 and 1820, broadening his knowledge and outlook and lifting himself above the common run of architects of his day. Once he became successful, he moved in the world of high Whig politics, particularly in the celebrated circle of Lord Holland.

His son's biography of him, painting him as a conventional eminent Victorian, does not bring him alive: we learn that he was a placid family man with very few outside friends, that he disliked all public display and rose to work at four or five in the morning. "The whole remembrance of his life is one of work, simplicity, geniality, and vigor, guided by a conscientious devotion to duty," his son recalls. The one attractive trait his son mentions is that "foreigners especially made their way with him, for he always liked the greater freedom and liveliness of Continental manners and character." His devotion to duty took its toll on his health, leading to illness and an early death, at the age of 60.

Augustus Pugin, whom Barry had the wit to hire in order to clothe with decorative and narrative ornament the exterior and interiors of the building that he had designed, could not have been more different in outlook

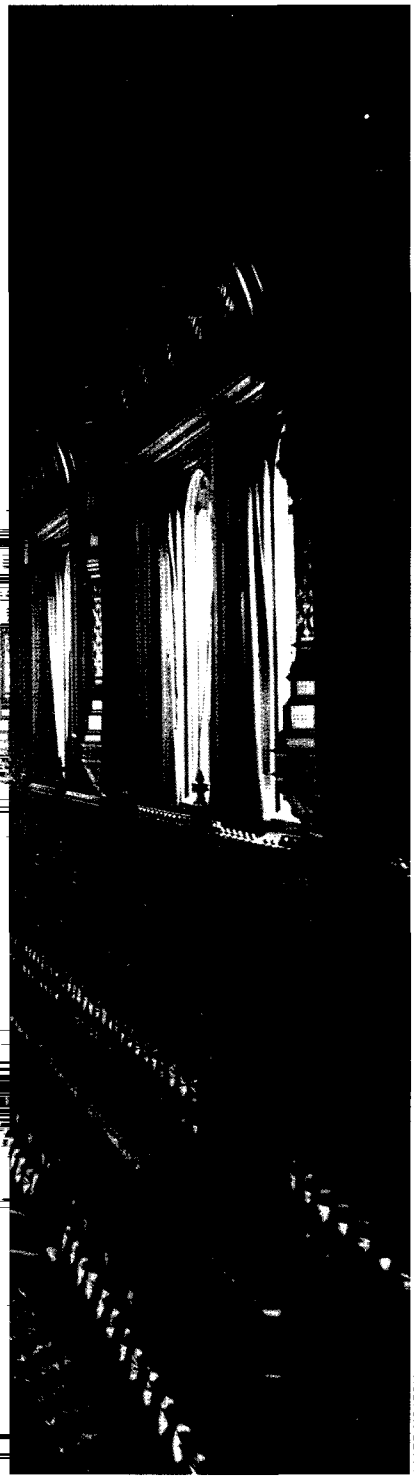
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



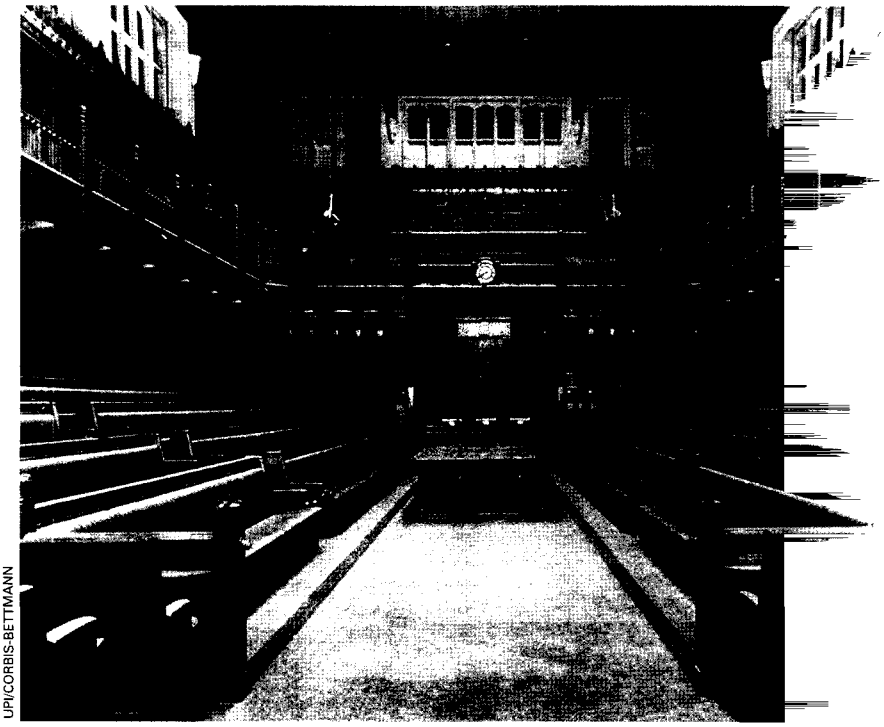
Churchill declared, when the original House of Commons (above) was bombed in World War II, . . .

and temperament from his conventional boss. Mercurial, passionate, and eccentric, Pugin was a febrile genius who had three wives in 12 years and was dead by the time he was 40. Only 22 at the time of the fire in 1834, in which year he became a Roman Catholic convert, Pugin was a fanatic about Gothic architecture, which he believed expressed revealed truth. He regarded bad design as synonymous with heresy, and he made no distinction between work and religion, art and love He believed that buildings should be designed so that the work craftsmen would do in erecting them would be enriching and fulfilling, and, partly in reaction

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



HULTON/GETTY



UPI/CORBIS-BETTMANN

. . . that its replacement (above) should be built on the same lines.

to the mechanized world introduced by the Industrial Revolution, he and his more celebrated disciple, John Ruskin, developed the idea that such honest craftsmanship was the soundest basis on which to organize all of society. In this vein, the leading architectural journal, *The Builder*, hoped that the work of erecting the Houses of Parliament would be "made morally influential for the advancement of the working builders, and through them for general building art."

It is much to Barry's credit that, despite the inevitable public criticism of Pugin in Protestant England for his polemical Catholicism, Barry insisted on employing him on the grounds of his outstanding artistic merit. It was, indeed, Pugin's superb draftsmanship that had particularly impressed the lay judges in the competition in 1835. Working day and night on his designs during the more than seven years that he worked for Barry, Pugin employed no clerk, exclaiming, "I should kill him in a week." Though boasting that, "If I had not the spirit of a lion with three tails I should never get over my difficulties," Pugin suffered a nervous breakdown in February 1852, followed by incarceration in the London mental asylum, Bethlehem Hospital, and premature death in September 1852.

Barry approached his task, he said, with one "great idea" in mind—that the building should be "a sculptured memorial of our national history," which would "instruct people in their history, elevate taste, improve

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HULTON GETTY

Small panels of ornament enliven the vast facades.

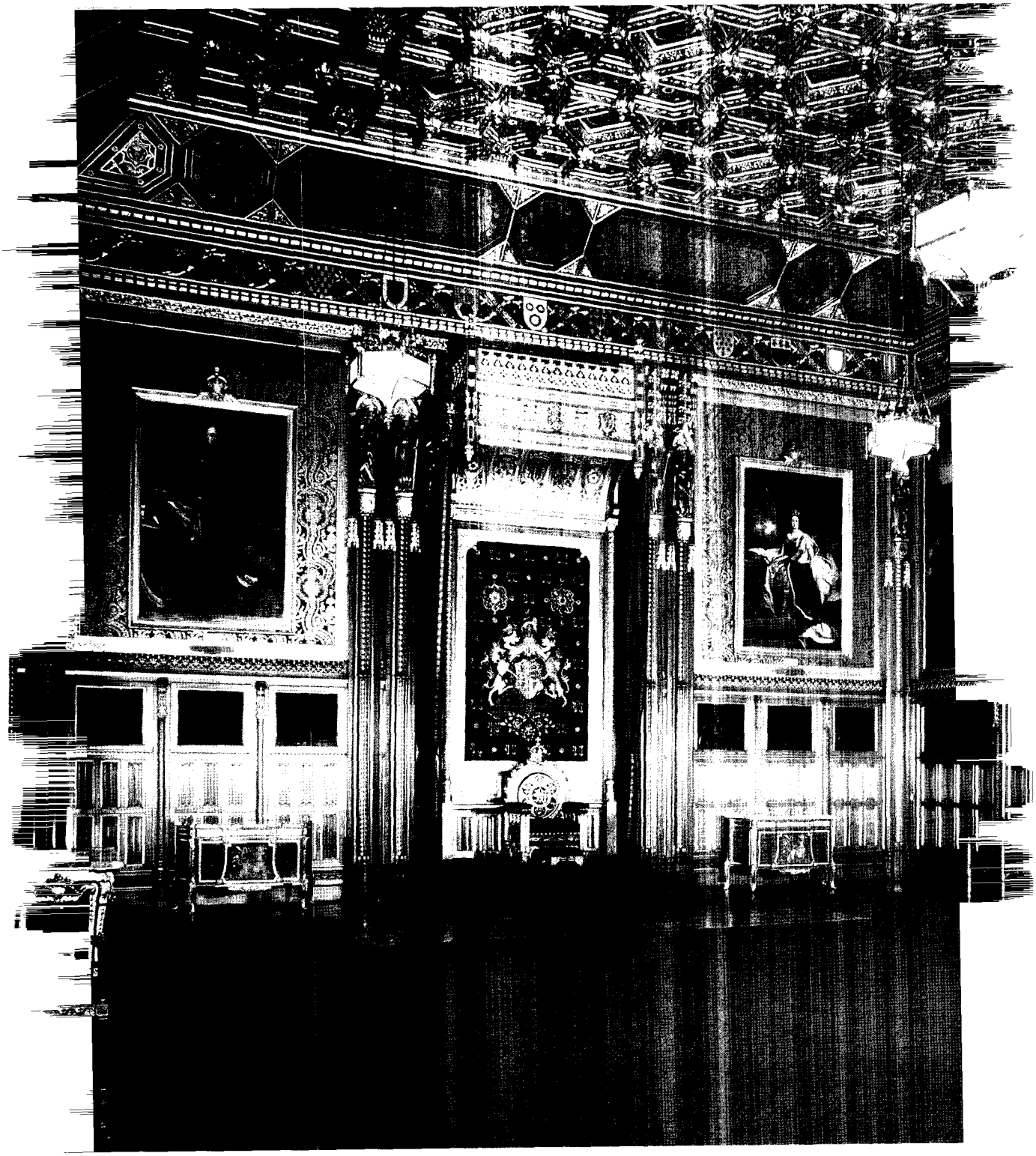
craftsmanship, sculpture, painting, and stained glass." His first problem in coming up with a design for a Gothic palace was that, though numerous medieval Gothic churches survived in England, only fragments of Gothic palaces remained. After journeying to Belgium and the Netherlands to study the secular Gothic style of the medieval town halls at Brussels and Louvain, he realized that he could adapt their tall, pitched roofs to enliven the long frontages of the building that was taking shape in his mind. He decided to clothe those facades with paneled and reticulated ornament inspired by the Perpendicular Gothic of Henry VII's Chapel at the adjacent Westminster Abbey. The small compartments of decoration give so vast a building a human scale. The river front he decided to adorn with statues of kings and queens and a series of royal coats of arms beginning with William the Conqueror. These were intended to express the legitimacy of leadership, its continuity in an unbroken tradition from earliest times to the present day.

As the building rose, Barry enlivened its skyline by three asymmetrically placed towers, including the universally familiar Big Ben. The Victoria Tower, 336 feet high, was the highest and largest square tower in the world, taller than the first American skyscrapers. It was totally modern in construction, with eight iron columns of between 8 and 14 inches in diameter supporting eight stone floors. The internal roof-framing at the palace is also of iron, as are the dormer windows, while the roofs are covered with interlocking cast-iron plates. Barry was forced against his wishes to add a third tower for the purposes of ventilation, an early example of architecture being influenced by mechanical services, though Barry gave it the form of a spire. Elsewhere, the building was not structurally innovative, being largely of load-bearing masonry bonded with iron cramps. What was new was the scale.

Expectations of what members of both houses of Parliament wanted from their new building had been heightened by the rise of London clubs, with their smoking rooms, dining rooms, and libraries; and their chosen architect, Barry, had just completed a famous Pall Mall club, the Travellers' Club (1830–32), and he was to build, next door, the most ambitious of all Victorian clubhouses, the Reform Club (1838–41). Barry provided all the desired amenities on the seven-acre site, with a river front nearly 800 feet long, in a building containing 1,180 rooms, 126 staircases, and more than two miles of corridors.

Work on the embankment in the river began in 1837, the foundation stone of the main building was laid by Mrs. Barry in April 1840, 1,400 workmen were employed at the height of construction in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

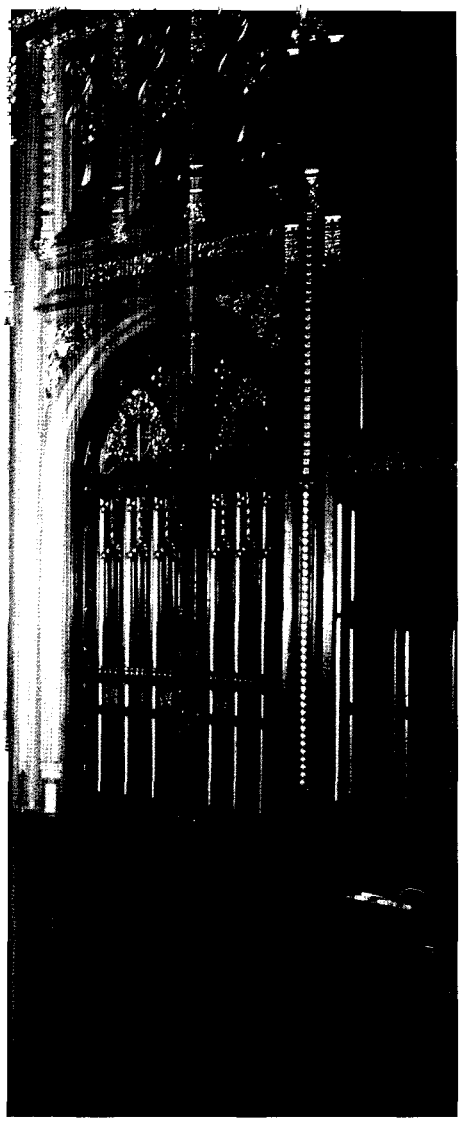


The Robing Room is the most striking embodiment of the building's moralizing spirit.

1848, and the New Palace opened in 1852. However, work on the interior decoration and furnishings continued for a decade after Barry's sudden death in May 1860.

In 1840, artists, invited to submit their proposals for decorative paintings based on British history or subjects from Spenser, Shakespeare, or Milton, sent in 634 drawings in charcoal or chalk. Exhibited in Westminster Hall, they drew 1,800 visitors a day, including the Queen. The final decision fell to a Royal Commission on the Fine Arts, appointed in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



PITKIN UNICHROME LTD

1841,with the Prince Consort, Prince Albert, as chairman. Barry, who had little admiration for the Prince, wasn't included. But the Prince was in harmony with Barry's impulse to educate

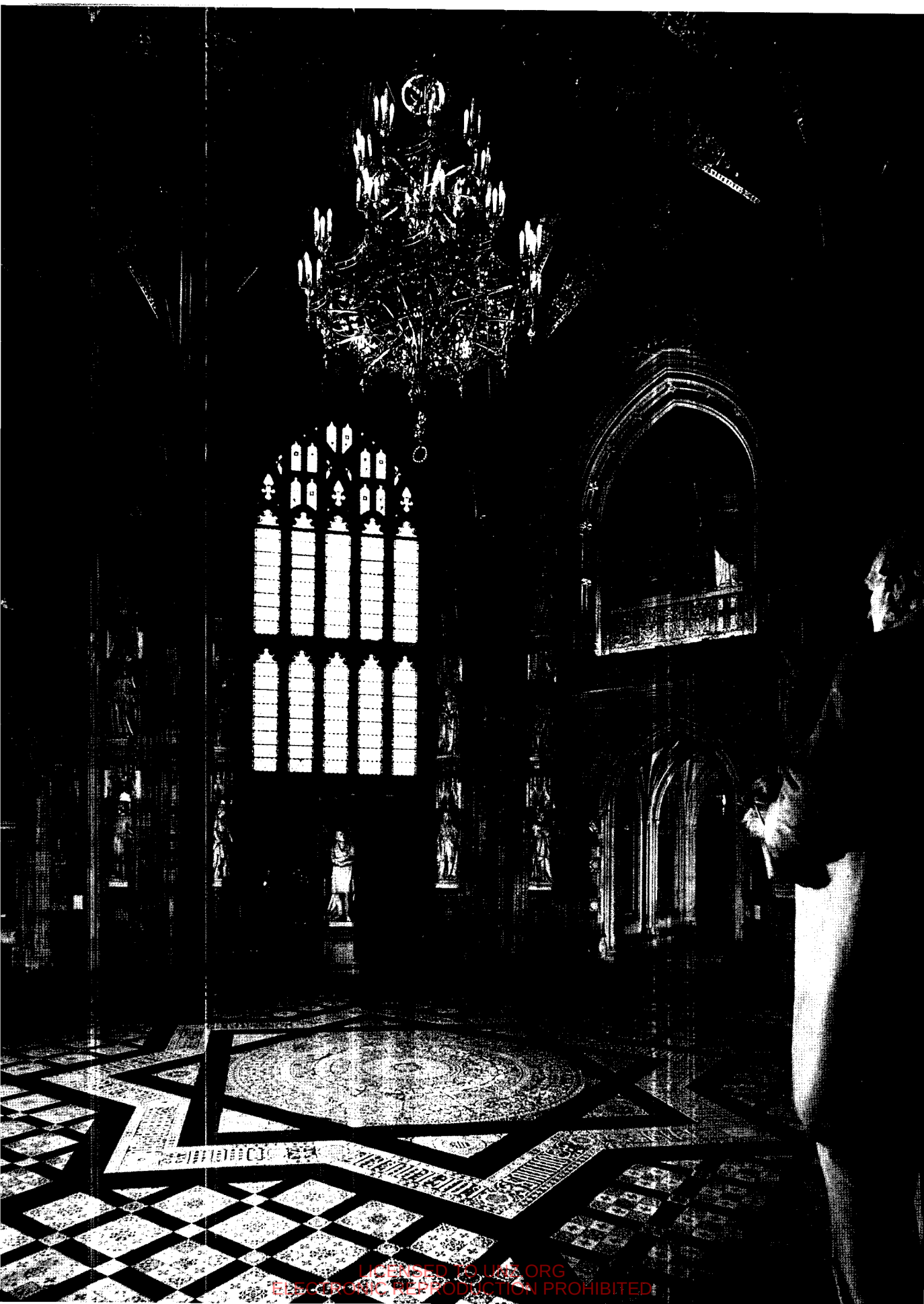
ate influenced by the erman Romantic painters, he believed that absolute laws governed both art and conduct, and they were the same laws, for the fine arts subserved morality. In this spirit, the commission's aim at Westminster was to use history to provide a series of moral lessons, expressing the values underlying the Crown, the Lords, and the Commons, each of which had its distinct section of the palace. The result was one of the most ambitious of the rare British attempts at state patronage of painting.

Surely the most striking and effective embodiment of the building's moralizing spirit is the Robing Room, the inner sanctum of the royal suite, embellished between 1849 and 1863 with representations of the legends of King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table by William Dyce. In this room, practically all the resources of British culture—history, myth, literature, painting, sculpture, and architecture—come together to speak in one voice a clear and moving message. The murals depict an ideal of leadership by a consummately civilized and noble king and aristocracy, perfect exemplars of such virtues as courtesy and chivalry. The feeling that the sixth-century Arthur was the first British national hero went back as far as 1344, when Edward III, seeking to form an order of chivalry, the Order of the Garter, established a Round Table along Arthurian lines, with the same number of knights, 300. And Arthur fired the imagination of nineteenth-century poets from Walter Scott to Tennyson.

After nearly 14 years' work on the frescoes, Dyce died in 1864, having completed five of the depictions of the seven chivalric virtues—mercy, religion, and so on—each identified in captions in Gothic script below the painting. (The painter had replied to complaints about the slow progress of his murals by explaining that Arthurian subjects necessitated the time-consuming representation of "a great quantity of chain mail.") Dyce drew his scenes from the great fifteenth-century Arthurian epic *Le Morte d'Arthur* by Sir Thomas Malory, and he drew as well from Malory the idea that true nobility rests on a code of conduct that must always trump mere self-interest.

Take the scene depicting generosity, which dramatizes one of the climactic moments of the *Morte d'Arthur*. As the company of the Round Table is disintegrating because of internal conflict—and Sir Launcelot has been driven against his will into a war against his lord, King Arthur—Launcelot's ally, Sir Bors, knocks Arthur off his horse in battle, jumps down with his sword drawn, and asks Launcelot, "Shall I make an end of this war?" by killing the king. Not so fast, Launcelot replies: "I will never see that most noble king that made me knight neither slain ne shamed." As he helps Arthur back upon his horse and begs him to end the war, tears come to the king's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO UHS.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

eyes at "the great courtesy that was in Sir Launcelot more than in any other man." No matter what the personal consequences, Malory dramatizes, nobility requires you to maintain your loyalty to your king.

As Dyce depicts them, the knightly virtues have a distinctly Victorian flavor, despite their medieval dress, and the paintings have very much the air of anchoring modern ideals in ancient authority. The larger lesson of this painting, beyond an appropriate reverence for the Crown and an insistence that leadership must be accompanied by virtue, is that national loyalty has a long and glorious past in Britain, rooted like so many other virtues in the nation's history, literature, and culture. And on a less exalted plane, the moral qualities Dyce holds out in the Robing Room for admiration and imitation by the monarchy and aristocracy of Victorian England are akin to those that, inspired by the example set by Rugby's great headmaster, Thomas Arnold, were preached in all the public schools from the most modest up to Eton and Harrow. Victorian gentlemen had learned in their schools that one did not hit a man when he was down. They took this code of gentlemanly honor out to the Empire and eventually to the trenches in the First World War. In a similar way, the scene depicting hospitality—it shows the admission to the Fellowship of the Round Table of Sir Tristram, "one of the best knights and the gentlest of the world"—must have looked to Victorian eyes like a medieval version of dinner in an officers' mess. Between 1867 and 1870, H.H. Armistead filled in the small compartments under Dyce's paintings with 18 lively, carved wooden bas-reliefs depicting other episodes in the Arthurian story.

The Robing Room's only practical function is as a dressing room for the Queen when she comes to Westminster Palace for the annual opening of Parliament. As she proceeds toward the House of Lords to give her speech, she first passes through the Royal Gallery, which, at 110 by 45 by 45 feet, is even larger than the House of Lords itself. Here frescoes celebrate British military history from the first-century warrior-queen Boadicea to Wellington. Since the Napoleonic Wars could be seen as the modern equivalent of Agincourt, the Crusades, or Arthur's last battle, the cycle is dominated by *The Death of Nelson* and *The Meeting of Wellington and Blucher after Waterloo*, both 45 feet long. Painted by Daniel Maclise, a close friend of Charles Dickens's, these lively figure compositions with bodies in motion are a graphic account of stress and emotion and a reminder of the military might and activist foreign policy on which Britain's then-vast empire rested. Dominating the painting of Wellington and Blucher is the Iron Duke on horseback. Maclise interprets him as the epitome of the modern chivalrous hero—not triumphalist, but grave and calm, honoring the dead and suffering soldiers all around him.

The next ceremonial room, the much smaller Prince's Chamber, is the last room before the House of Lords itself. It celebrates the glories of the Tudor monarchy, which had so spectacularly revived the nation's fortunes after the Wars of the Roses. The middle compartments of the walls display an attractive series of 28 Tudor royal family portraits. Below them are 12 bronze bas-reliefs by William Theed of Tudor history, including Elizabeth I knighting Sir Francis Drake and (inevitably) Sir Walter Raleigh spreading his coat as a carpet before her. This brilliant age of poetry and prosperity, of drama and discovery, the high noon of chivalry and adventure, was here convincingly presented to the Victorians as a precursor of their own ebullient age.

Lest anyone miss the implication, John Gibson's monumental marble statue of Queen Victoria of 1856, crowned and seated on the throne, dominates the Prince's Chamber. In this extraordinary image of almost divine self-assurance, Protestant England seemed to draw on the iconography of Roman Catholicism, for it resembles some great statue of the Virgin Mary as Queen of Heaven. Flanked by two freestanding female figures of Justice and Mercy—more virtues, this time seven feet high—the queen

ARCHIVE PHOTOS

The Central Lobby

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

holds the scepter and a laurel crown, indicating that she not only governs her subjects but also rewards them for intellect and valor. Lions behind the throne, symbolizing British strength and courage, are accompanied by sea horses, denoting British dominion of the seas.

On the pedestal are bas-reliefs depicting commerce, science, and technical progress, with a steam engine, telegraph wire, "and other useful objects." The use of public money in this whole elaborate decorative program must have seemed triumphantly justified in this image of the energy and confidence of early Victorian England. Here, a world power was given legitimacy by its ancient historical and mythical traditions embodied in this representation of the monarch.

In the House of Lords itself, the decoration speaks to Parliament in a by now familiar idiom. Frescoes of the *Spirit of Chivalry*, painted by Maclise, extol the virtues of justice, religion, and chivalry. Over the throne on the south wall are historical exemplifications of these three virtues: the boy Henry V acknowledging the authority of Chief Justice Gascoign represents justice; the baptism of King Ethelbert by St. Augustine represents religion; and Edward III represents the spirit of chivalry by founding the Order of the Garter and making his son, the Black Prince, a knight. Stationed high upon the wall and wearing chain mail are 18 bronze statues in canopied niches of the barons who forced King John to assent to the Magna Carta in 1215. The nineteenth-century observer would understand the suggestion that Britain's modern constitutional monarchy had ancient roots. Pugin claimed to have produced 2,000 drawings for details in this room alone.

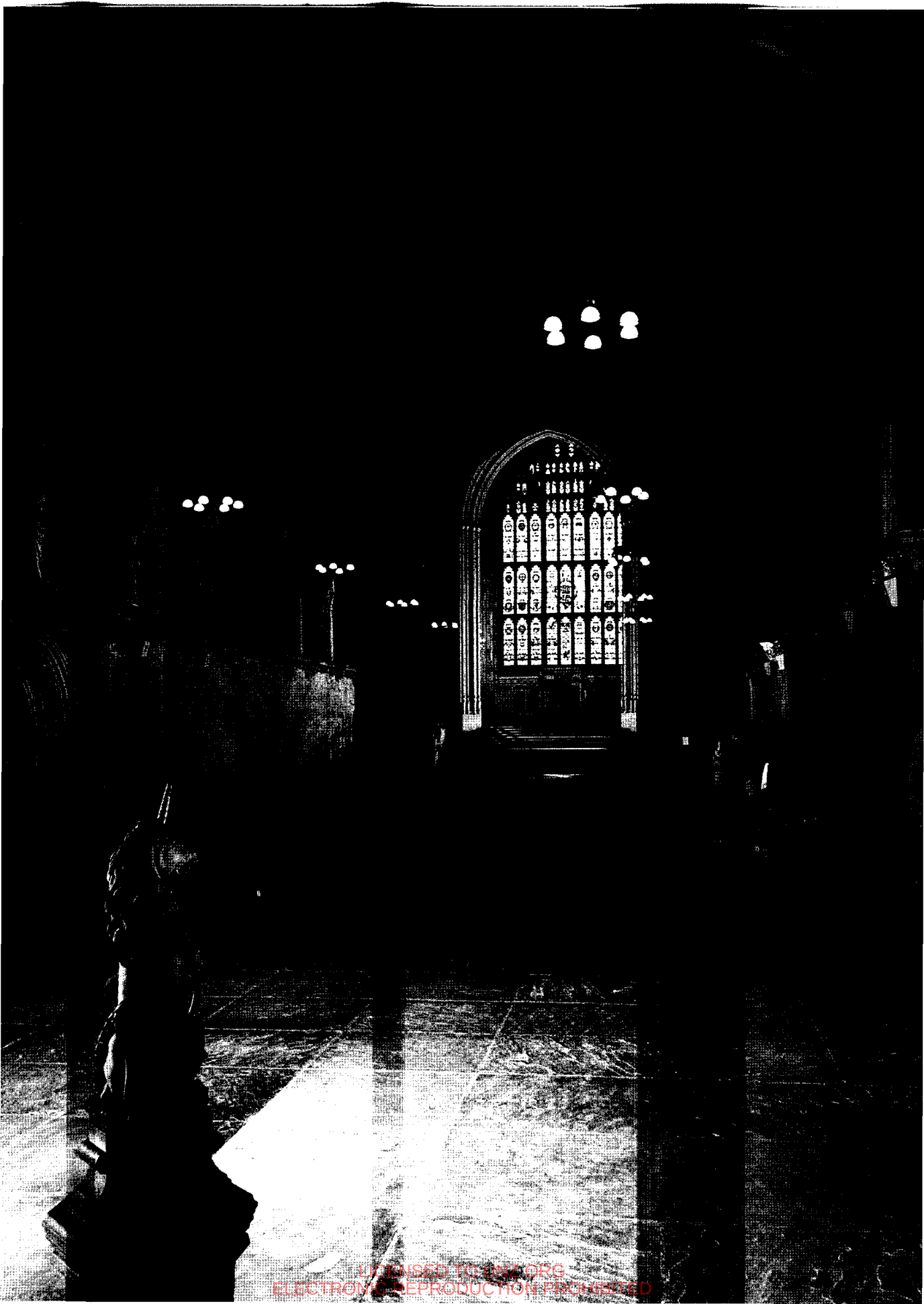
The House of Commons was smaller and less colorful than the House of Lords, lacking frescoes or sculpture. Destroyed by enemy action in 1941, it was rebuilt after the war in simplified form by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, architect of the superb Gothic cathedral at Liverpool. At Churchill's insistence, it recalled the plan and form of Barry's chamber and, in particular, its small size, even though this means that not all members can be accommodated at once. Churchill was, however, determined to retain its intimate, club-like atmosphere.

The influential modernist architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner, typically, lamented that it was not rebuilt in "the twentieth-century style." One of the most disastrous myths of the twentieth century was that new technology meant that traditional forms of architecture and design were dead, irrelevant, and unusable. Barry's building shows how nonsensical that inhuman view is, for, despite its Gothic detail, it has an instantly recognizable identity as a nineteenth-century monument. Not only did Barry effortlessly incorporate the most advanced technology in construction and servicing, but Pugin showed how Gothic design was also compatible with totally modern unmedieval objects, such as thermometer cases, calendar cards, umbrella stands, iron hat and coat stands, dispatch boxes, letter boxes, wooden notice stands, bell pulls, as well as plates and hinges for swing doors. The building also shows the modesty of Barry, who was ordered to build in a style not of his choice or desire. Leading modern architects are prima donnas who tolerate no such constraints.

At the New Palace of Westminster, Barry and Pugin may be said to have given their lives to ensure that stones, paintings, and carvings would themselves have life, so as to speak to future generations. Through the blankness and materialism of modern architecture and culture, mankind has become deaf to this kind of language, so that it now has to be decoded. Léon Krier has written a devastating attack on modernism in his new book, *Architecture: Choice or Fate.* Krier asks whether there is a connection between the common perception of contemporary institutions such as NATO, the United Nations, and the European Union and the crass, utilitarian style of their buildings, which seem so deliberately lacking in symbolic expression. The dignity, authority, and self-respect of institutions such as those housed in St. Peter's, the Capitol, and the Houses of Parliament are, by contrast, made visible in the majesty of their architecture. •

The medieval Westminster Hall

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



LICENSED TO BNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Zero Intolerance

Theodore Dalrymple

Look at the fist of a British criminal and chances are you'll find a blue dot tattooed on each knuckle. Each dot stands for a letter of the alphabet—A.C.A.B.—which together stand for All Coppers Are Bastards. When under arrest and in the custody of the police, however, the bearer of such a tattoo maintains that its symbolism is religious: the letters stand for Always Carry A Bible.

Among the poor, of course, the police have never been popular. But interestingly, today the all-coppers-are-bastards view of the police has spread to a large section of the bourgeois intellectual class. Not long ago, for example, a journalist told me, *en passant*, that he hated the police. I asked him why: had they falsely arrested, unjustifiably manhandled, brutally interrogated him? No, he replied: he had no personal reason; he just hated them for what they were.

Well, as King Lear said, nothing comes of nothing: and the journalist's hatred of the police was unlikely to have sprung completely at random and fully formed from his consciousness. I suspected, as is so often the case with opinions lightly adopted but firmly held, that this one was forged from a combination of ignorance, dishonesty, and fashion.

A SUSPECTED CHARACTER:
You've stolen that Gentlemans pocket handkerchief you scoundrel.
No Sir. I've only borrowed it, see vot a cold I've got, and I've left my own vipe at home.
N°20

MARY EVANS PICTURE LIBRARY

In former days, English policemen arrested malefactors.

By expressing a dislike of the police, a bourgeois intellectual is thereby establishing his solidarity with the poor. In an age of empathy, you can't claim to wish anyone well unless you fully share his feelings.

But the bourgeois intellectual needs to find reasons for his opinions: rationalization is, after all, his *métier*. And it isn't difficult for him to think up such reasons with regard to the police. Their function is, after all, to defend the social order: and since the social order is widely held to be responsible for the poverty of the poor, it follows that the police are in part responsible for that poverty. They are a part, not of the criminal justice system, but of the social injustice system.

The intellectual never acknowledges how much of his liberty he owes to the existence of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

police—a humiliating thought, to which he prefers the idea that the comparative peace and tranquility in which he lives, and that make his work possible, emerge spontaneously from the goodwill of his fellow men, requiring no external coercion to maintain them. Since—in the opinion of the intellectual—the poor hate the police, and moreover as victims can think no wrong, it follows that weak policing would be of benefit to the poor.

It so happens that something close to a natural experiment in weak policing is under way in my district of the city, where the police are a minimal presence and intervene only in the very gravest of situations. Far from having adopted a policy of zero tolerance, as in New York, they have adopted one of zero *in*tolerance; and their approach to crime is almost as abstract—as ethereal—as that of liberal criminologists. It is therefore of some interest, both practical and theoretical, to examine whether the quality of life of the poor has improved or deteriorated under this lax police regime.

The policy of zero intolerance appears to have sprung from the brains of the city's most senior policemen, increasingly indistinguishable in their public pronouncements from senior social workers. Their constituency is not the people of the city but the liberal intelligentsia. A policeman on the beat who had occasion to visit my ward recently told me that he and his colleagues were under orders not to arrest and charge anyone who was previously unknown to the police for crimes up to and including attempted murder. As an old hand nearing an eagerly anticipated retirement from a job he had once loved, he found this instruction deeply demoralizing. It was, he knew, a virtual incitement to crime.

The policy of zero intolerance is no mere local aberration. The chief of police of another force explained recently in an essay why it was necessary to keep arrests to a minimum. It takes four hours to process each one, he wrote, and therefore such arrests distracted the police from their other duties. He never explained what police duties could be more important than the apprehension of lawbreakers, nor did he call for a streamlining of the process of arrest (which requires, on average, 43 forms). Besides, he added, mere repression of criminality, whenever the police chanced to catch a criminal, would never on its own put an end to crime. Much better, he seemed to imply, to let the criminals get on with it.

And get on with it they have, not surprisingly. I encounter instances of police inaction in the face of crime every day. For example, a man in his early thirties arrived in the emergency department of my hospital recently, having taken a deliberate but not life-threatening overdose of tablets. His wife arrived while he was awaiting further medical attention. The pair resumed the quarrel that had been the occasion of his overdose, and before long he employed his usual final, irrefutable argument: his fists. The sound of his blows raining down on her head alerted the nurses to the situation: by the time they came to the wife's rescue, she was on the floor, vainly trying to avoid his kicks to her face and stomach.

The nurses called the police, two of whom duly arrived (an eventuality by no means guaranteed). They left soon afterward, without even having requested the husband not to behave in this fashion again. They told the nurses that it was *a domestic*, and that therefore they were powerless to act. An Englishman's emergency room, apparently, is his castle—and his wife his property.

That a crime is domestic—or, in the words of those who commit such a crime, *just a domestic*—has long been the most frequently cited of many police excuses for folding their hands and doing nothing. Their habitual reluctance to intervene in what they regard as essentially private disputes is the result, no doubt, of several considerations: among them, a laudable, if imperfectly thought-out, desire to separate the realm of personal morality from that of law. There should be a limit to state supervision of the relations between people, and not every morally reprehensible act should draw a legal sanction. The police view intervention in *domestics* (quite apart from its practical futility, for victims

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

often balk at testifying in court) as an almost totalitarian extension of their powers.

But even on the most generous interpretation of the scope of the private—a senior British policeman once famously, or infamously, remarked that a certain murder was not serious: it was only a man killing his wife—what happened in the emergency room was not domestic, or even *a domestic*. It was an offense not merely against the victim but against public order. Yet still the police failed to act.

In one respect the police were correct in their understanding of the situation: the man's wife had forgiven him by the time she was picked up off the floor, and she would have refused to testify against him in court. She likewise refused all offers of help to obtain accommodation away from him (he would find her anyway, she said), and she didn't want a lawyer. Her only concern now was to bring him the things he said he would need during his stay in the hospital.

But the police didn't need the wife's testimony to bring a successful prosecution. The nurses had heard and seen enough to convict him 20 times over. The officers' final words of self-justification as they departed the scene were that they were too busy to deal with so trivial a matter. They did not mention what they were busy with.

The effect on the nurses of this dereliction of duty was—at least for a time, until further emergencies occupied their attention—profound and demoralizing. Not only did they feel, rightly, that the police considered valueless the evidence they could so easily have given, as if they were not trustworthy witnesses, but they felt that their position as law-abiding citizens anxious to do their duty was devalued, too.

Moreover, many of the nurses inhabit a world not so far removed, physically or morally, from that of the abused wife in the emergency room. Many of them consult me about their problems: one of the nurses in the emergency room that day had a drug-taking daughter whose various boyfriends were violent toward her; another had asked me earlier what to do about her violent common-law husband. So when they see a man beat up a woman in a public place with complete impunity, indeed with what almost amounted to police protection, they catch a horrifying glimpse of their own vulnerability.

And finally, the incident took place in the emergency department of a large inner-city hospital, in which a considerable proportion of the patients present were, almost by definition, of the same cast of mind as the violent husband. They would have remarked the impotence of the police in the face of this conduct and would have drawn the appropriate conclusion: that you can get away with anything short of murder.

In addition, the culprit himself would soon, no doubt, be spreading the good news in the pubs he frequented, embellishing the tale to present himself to his listeners as even more heroic in his defeat of the police than he already believed himself to be. When I spoke to him after the policemen left the emergency room, he told me that he was himself astonished that he had never once been called to account by the law for his numerous assaults, not only on his wife but upon many others. (His first assault on his wife had been at their wedding reception, in front of the guests.) One of the criteria for diagnosing psychopathy is an individual's failure to learn from experience: but thus far this man had not had the experience from which he might have failed to learn.

The police display perverse ingenuity in concocting reasons for nonintervention in domestic violence. A recent patient of mine had finally broken away from the jealous, drunken, and violent father of her three illegitimate children. She had found her own apartment and had lived there quietly for some time, when she held a birthday party for one of her children. But somehow her former boyfriend had discovered where she lived and, on that very afternoon, had rung at her door. She answered; he barged his way in. He dragged her by the hair into the room where the party was taking place and punched her to the ground, kicking her in front of the terrified children. Then he left.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She called the police. She was battered and bruised, and the children who had seen the assault were still there. The police said there was nothing they could do, because she had opened the door to her assailant. And they left.

The police opinion in this case appeared to be that, once you let a man into your house, he is free thereafter to behave in any way he likes. Even after her physical recovery, my patient was in no position to dispute this extraordinary police doctrine: she belonged to that vast class never taught to read or write properly. Unable to set out a letter—not knowing even that the first-person singular pronoun is written in the upper case (I tested her)—she was obliged to take the police at their word.

When I put this case to the police force's second in command, he expressed surprise. The only explanation he could think of for his policemen's conduct was that the woman had taken out a restraining order against the man and in effect nullified it by opening the door to him. It was this nullification, he hypothesized, that led to the police's failure to act. That so high-ranking a policeman (transparently a decent man) could have so deficient an understanding should terrify the law-abiding and comfort the wrongdoer.

In their struggle to stay inactive, the police often make a point I hear with some sympathy: that prosecution isn't worth the effort because of the inadequate sentences that follow conviction. For example, a prisoner I know, who had many times beaten up and half-strangled his girlfriend—who had three times threatened to kill her and had once kidnapped her—received a sentence that meant he'd serve only 15 months in jail (nine of them already served while awaiting trial) instead of the ten years' imprisonment the law allowed. He had made it crystal clear that he would keep pursuing his girlfriend, whatever sentence he received; and his previous record—he had burned the car of another girlfriend, then pregnant, who had tried to leave him—would have suggested to anyone except the judge that he would pose a threat to his former girlfriend and to any other woman he might meet in the future. The judge's leniency was therefore callous in the extreme toward the well-being of society.

But it would compound the damage to make the argument that, because a 15-month sentence was inadequate, it would have been better for this prisoner to have received no sentence at all. Nonetheless, this is precisely what the police implicitly do argue, and it remains one of the cornerstones of their edifice of passivity.

A drunk deliberately stubbed out his cigarette on the face of a senior nurse in our emergency department, burning her cheek. The police came but, having inspected her injury, declared that it was not severe enough for the crime to be worth prosecuting. Perhaps they reasoned that the drunk, not remembering what he had done after he had sobered up, would therefore not learn a lesson. As agents of the state, however, they had made clear what value the state placed on the physical safety of the nurse: zero.

Another standard excuse for police inaction is that the offender is mad, or at least is a psychiatric patient (not quite the same thing, of course). The merest hint of a psychiatric history—a single consultation with a psychiatrist five years previously is enough—will explain and excuse almost anything in the eyes of the police, and justifies a failure to prosecute.

Not long ago I was called to a police station to examine a man arrested after attempting to kill his lawyer. He had a long history of psychosis—caused or exacerbated by taking drugs—and lawbreaking. He had gone to his lawyer with a hammer with one end sharpened into a pick, had shouted, "You have to die!" and had aimed a blow at the lawyer's head.

Fortunately, the lawyer saw the blow coming, twisted out of the way, and received only a slight injury. His violent client tried again to hit him, but having missed, fled the office: after which the lawyer called the police.

It was clear that the man was mad: but I knew from expe-

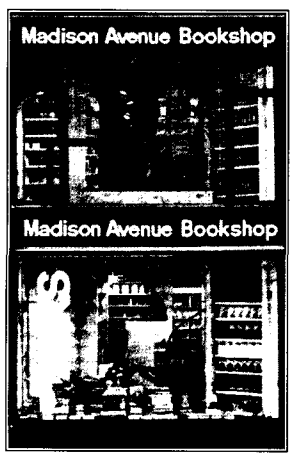
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The voice of freedom never faltered, even though it stuttered.

Winston Churchill was perhaps the most stirring, eloquent speaker of this century. He also stuttered.

Learn about the many ways you can help yourself or your child. Because your finest hour lies ahead.

STUTTERING FOUNDATION OF AMERICA
A Non-Profit Organization
Since 1947—Helping Those Who Stutter
Call Toll-Free 1-800-992-9392
P.O. Box 11749 • Memphis, TN 38111-0749



Madison Avenue Bookshop

833 Madison Avenue
(between 69th & 70th Sts.)
New York, New York 10021
535-6130

rience that if I recommended he be admitted straight to the hospital, the police would forget the whole matter of the attempted murder. I insisted that charges be filed: but the police refused, saying—falsely, of course—that they were not permitted to prosecute madmen. They said that if he were not hospitalized, they would have to release him—which they did: first giving him back his hammer, for they had no right to deprive him of his property. Thus an attempted murder did not reach the crime statistics, and the police could congratulate themselves on the maintenance of public order.

Needless to say, the mad understand the impunity of madness well. Twice I have heard schizophrenics exclaim to the police, "You can't touch me, I'm a schizophrenic!"

On the very day on which I wrote this, I interviewed a patient—an alcoholic—who sometime before had, while extremely drunk, tried to strangle his girlfriend. He had smashed her car, wrecked her apartment, and threatened to kill her daughter. By the time the police arrived, he had started to attack his girlfriend's neighbor, who had come to help. The police concluded that no sane man would behave like this, took him to the hospital, and left him there. As far as they were concerned, the incident was closed: and these crimes also did not reach the crime statistics. This is how we now control criminality in England.

Domestic crimes are not alone in getting such lighthearted treatment. In the last two weeks, the following three cases have come to my notice.

An acquaintance of mine, a dealer in antique jewelry, exhibited at an antiques fair. Overnight, a thief broke into the exhibition hall and stole her jewelry, worth $32,000, as well as that of other exhibitors, worth a further $120,000. In this instance, the police caught the thief the following day: he was on bail for eight country-house burglaries, itself a sign of police frivolity, for, had they objected strenuously enough to the setting of bail, he would still have been in custody. Despite their swift apprehension of the culprit, however, the police had not recovered a single piece of jewelry (something a private detective surely would have been able to do); indeed, they claim to be too busy to make the effort. Little wonder that the insurance premiums on antique jewelry are too high for most small dealers to pay. So my acquaintance must swallow the whole loss—to her, a catastrophe.

A patient of mine became severely depressed after some young thieves, well known in the area, broke into the shed in her garden and stole her children's new bicycles. Her neighbors, it so happened, were able to make a clear videotape of the thieves as they stole, but—two weeks later—the police still had not responded to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

either my patient's or her neighbors' request for assistance. Bicycle theft, after all, is not a serious crime.

A prisoner with a long history of violent crime as well as theft and burglary was coming to the end of his most recent prison sentence. He frankly admitted to me that he was much happier in prison than at liberty: the enforced discipline of prison life enabled him to live at peace. He came to me in desperation: could I do something to prevent his release, for he knew he would soon commit a dangerous offense again, possibly even a murder?

He had gone to the prison warden, asking not to be released. The warden told him that there was no legal way to do that. In an attempt to stay in prison, he then confessed to several serious crimes, with which he had never been charged. Corroboration of his confession would have been possible, and the warden called in the police. But they declined to take the matter further, saying that it was not in the public interest to do so.

The prisoner then assaulted and seriously injured another inmate to receive more prison time. Again, the police came but declined to take the matter further, saying that it was not in the public interest to do so. The prisoner was released June 12.

The loss of nerve or will on the part of the police has occurred at precisely the same time as a weakening, almost to the point of extinction, of the informal but strong social restraints upon personal behavior that once made England so civil a country—restraints such as fear of what the neighbors will say. The lack of either internal or external restraint has allowed "natural" man to emerge: and far from being a delight, he is a charmless psychopath. Man is a wolf to Man, and more particularly to Woman.

Naturally, social trends do not affect all sectors of society equally. Weak policing affects principally the poor—the very people whose welfare the intelligentsia claimed weak policing would benefit. It is true that the middle classes haven't been unscathed: they pay ever-higher insurance premiums for their homes and cars, and they worry as never before about burglary. There is scarcely anyone in the country—even among the burglars themselves—whose first thought on returning home is not, "Have I been burgled?"

But these are trifling concerns beside my patients' pervasive and permanent sense of personal insecurity wherever they may be. They fear lawbreakers, because they know the police offer no protection. The degree to which fear of crime rules the lives of people in poor areas is something that my middle-class friends find hard to believe, let alone understand. Scores of my patients have told me that they leave their homes as rarely as possible for fear of being attacked or of having their homes broken into. Every week I meet patients who have been mugged or burgled three times or more in a year; last week I had a patient whom the children next door stone—literally shower with stones—whenever she leaves the house. They have broken her windows on innumerable occasions and have smeared the walls of her house with feces while she was out. No one has ever been apprehended for these offenses, and she has given up informing the police of them.

The pretense by intellectuals—which, alas, has not been without its practical effects in the real world—that the police are but the executive arm of a hypocritical bourgeoisie determined to preserve its ill-gotten gains at the expense of the poor, is terrifyingly shallow when tested against the experience of people who suffer weak policing. The idea that a juster social order would render the police redundant is utopian nonsense. A reliable and trustworthy police force is not a denial of freedom but a precondition of its exercise. For those who doubt it, I can only recommend the last lines of Pablo Neruda's poem of the Spanish civil war:

Come and see the blood
running through the streets!
Come and see the blood
running through the streets!
Come and see the blood
running through the streets!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Letters

Everybody Loves Sex Ed

To the editor:
I was appalled by Wendy Shalit's article "Sex Ed's Dead End" (Spring 1998). Ms. Shalit never called SIECUS for comment and seriously misrepresents our work, the goals of comprehensive sexuality education, and the research that shows that skill-based programs can effectively help young adults either delay becoming involved in sexual intercourse or use contraception and condoms if they do become involved.

Ms. Shalit ignores overwhelming evidence that parents and professional organizations believe young people benefit from sexuality education. More than 80 percent of parents support sexuality education. More than 115 of the country's major national organizations, including the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, the National Council of Churches, and the YWCA of the USA, endorse sexuality education for all children. Those who want the facts should visit our website: www.siecus.org.

Debra W. Haffner
President and CEO, SIECUS

Wendy Shalit responds:
Ms. Haffner never once says how I misrepresent SIECUS's position; she merely offers up the address of its website. Well, I encourage people to visit her website, too. That is, in fact, where I first learned that SIECUS recommended "oral sex," "pleasure," and "fantasy" as "sexuality topics for parent-child discussions." It was also on SIECUS's website where I learned that "the nation's most prominent researchers in sexuality education" were having doubts about sex education.

The only thing Ms. Haffner has to say in SIECUS's defense is that parents and various organizations *believe* that young people benefit from sex education. Not

FPG

according to the material on her own website. Look under the "SIECUS Publications" icon and click on the box entitled "But Does it Work?" But the point of my article, which Ms. Haffner doesn't address, is that sex education hasn't been good for those receiving it. Talking about these intimate subjects in kindergarten—as SIECUS advocates—erodes children's natural embarrassment and, in the long run, has only made kids more vulnerable to disease and heartbreak. Frankly, if I were the president of SIECUS, I would be appalled, too.

Enraged, Indignant, Incensed

To the editor:
Heather Mac Donald's article "Why Johnny's Teacher Can't Teach" (Spring 1998) willfully, maliciously, and wrongly frames the discussion about diversity and multiculturalism as a one-sided debate about race. What I asked my large lecture hall full of not just white students, but students who represent the rich tapestry of diversity found in this city, was, What labels do you place on young people that are based on your background, beliefs, biases, and assumptions? This is dramatically different from what Ms. Mac Donald elected to focus on in her effort to misrepresent, dishonor, and disparage the importance of not only teaching, but knowing, understanding, acknowledging, and appreciating others who are not like ourselves. Both Johnny and his teacher are human beings first before they are anything else. How Ms. Mac Donald decided to characterize this reality served to make her position more xenophobic, intractable, and misinformed than I believed possible. The discussion about what Johnny's teacher needs to learn in her preparation program often excludes the Johnnys, Janets, and Josés: a wide range of students who come with

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

many different experiences, needs, talents, and dreams.

Teachers College, an institution that prepares hundreds of teachers to teach in schools all over the world, is bravely tackling its moral responsibility to help all teachers to become aware of their potential clients: students with a wide range of learning styles, needs, interests, talents, not to mention those whose first language may not be English and who represent different ethnicities, nationalities, origins, and religions. This knowledge serves to help teachers to know their students and teach them well. All good teachers, regardless of ethnicity, race, or religion, are engaged in a delicate relationship with their students that involves building cultural, intellectual, and emotional doorways that they and their students walk back and forth through all day, every day.

Valerie Henning-Piedmonte, Ed. D.
Teachers College, Columbia University

To the Editor:
Heather Mac Donald criticizes New York's teacher education programs for emphasizing the latest pedagogical trends over mastery of subject matter—the "Anything But Knowledge credo," in her words. Ms. Mac Donald implies that Hunter College's education program tolerates "potential teacher ignorance"—an opinion not based on objective fact.

Indeed, Hunter undergraduates who wish to become teachers take approximately three-quarters of their courses in the traditional liberal arts and sciences. They major first and foremost in a specific subject. Thus, the college insists that prospective teachers demonstrate solid knowledge of the subject they plan to teach and acquire a well-grounded education in the humanities and sciences.

In the past year, we have added requirements to ensure that students receive even broader exposure to the arts and sciences, demonstrate effective writing, and pass a series of academic benchmarks in order to continue in the teacher-education program.

Hunter's education students are superbly prepared for teaching. In January 1998, our students scored an average of 83 on the Liberal Arts and Sciences test required for New York State Teacher Certification—seven points higher than the statewide average. On the teaching skills test, Hunter students averaged 91—eight points higher than students from all other institutions. We believe that our pride in our education program is justified.

Hugh Scott
Dean, Division of Programs in Education
Hunter College, CUNY

Heather Mac Donald responds:
I thank Dr. Henning-Piedmonte for her inimitable demonstration of both the "Anything But Knowledge" doctrine and ed-school prose style. I have searched her letter in vain for any awareness that the crisis facing teachers today is student ignorance, not student "difference." Teens are graduating from high school knowing ever less about history, language, math, geography, and science. Reversing that trend should be educators' all-consuming passion; instead, like Dr. Henning-Piedmonte, they amuse themselves with ever more baroque elaborations of identity politics. Her classroom sounds like an encounter session, not a place where teachers transmit knowledge.

Good teachers intuitively treat their students as individuals. Columbia's obsession with difference is not about individuals, however, but about institutionalizing certain group identities to use as a bludgeon against society. And while an awareness of student individuality is helpful, it is no substitute for giving students a core of common knowledge.

Dr. Henning-Piedmonte is right about one thing, however: race is not the only difference Teachers College obsesses about. The college requires its social studies candidates, for example, to study the "needs" of gay and lesbian students, though surely a firm grasp of history would serve a prospective history teacher better than knowing the academy's latest take on homosexual politics.

Hunter College's liberal arts and sciences requirement is indeed an improvement over many undergraduate education programs. Unfortunately, Hunter has by no means repudiated the most egregious ed school mal-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Letters

practices—witness the widespread assignment of illiterate Marxist ideologue Donald Macedo and other merchants of multiculturalism. Hunter's math program embraces the new anti-drilling, anti-memorization dogma that is producing math illiterates. If Dean Scott truly wants to produce educated graduates, he should eliminate political propaganda and focus exclusively on core knowledge and authoritative teaching methods.

Teaching American History

To the Editor:
Joy Hakim's *A History of US*, highlighted in Sol Stern's article "The Rebirth of American History?" (Spring 1998), has much to commend it, particularly when compared with the unimaginative and politically correct volumes which have come to dominate the school textbook market. Unfortunately, Ms. Hakim's series is itself seriously flawed by these same ideological distortions.

I take no great pleasure in pointing this out to the readers of *City Journal*, since the John M. Olin Foundation provided a small grant some years ago to underwrite the author's research expenses. This support was approved after a review of early volumes in the series, which we judged to be clear and fair-minded narratives on the settlement of the American continent and the origins and development of our institutions. With respect to those volumes that guide young readers from the origins of our country down through World War II, Mr. Stern's praise is well justified.

Like many writers, however, Ms. Hakim appears to have lost her intellectual balance when she came to write about contemporary American history. Her discussions of the events and personalities of this period run along conventional liberal lines.

The final volume, in particular, contains an openly ideological attack on President Ronald Reagan and his policies. Ms. Hakim recycles every canard raised by Reagan's opponents. For her, the 1980s were a decade in which "the rich got very rich, and the poor got much poorer." She ignores Reagan's success in bringing down inflation and federal taxes and in setting in motion economic growth that continues to this day. Nor does she give him any credit for ending the Cold War, other than to call him a "flexible negotiator."

By contrast, Ms. Hakim's appraisal of Bill Clinton reads like an advertisement from the Democratic National Committee: "There was something appropriate about the American people picking a leader who had been born in a town named Hope. And it was fitting that Bill Clinton had a big smile and a confident manner to go with that beautifully named hometown." Mr. Clinton "wanted to help Americans pursue happiness" in a nation where (quoting his inaugural address) "everyone has a place at the table and not a single child is left behind."

Plainly, the fair-mindedness of Ms. Hakim's early volumes was discarded as she approached the end of her narrative. It is unfortunate that such gross distortions mar the final volumes of an otherwise valuable series.

James Piereson
Executive Director
John M. Olin Foundation

To the editor:
Objective journalism bases itself on research. I would need a research paper to show the many flaws in Sol Stern's article. Instead, let me offer an example.

We believe that the United States is a great country that represents the ideals of humanity and provides opportunities for all. At Newcomers, however, we don't believe in a dominant culture in which newly arrived immigrants must be *dominated*, lose their ideals, and accept the past as something that cannot be changed.

You condescendingly note about our school that "Some 1,000 students with limited English skills are trying to get up to speed in the English language while they begin taking some regular academic subjects, an admirable goal." This is an example of a dominant-culture mentality.

In addition to a strong ESL program, we offer regents classes to students, including advance placement classes, and we have won academic and cultural

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

awards throughout the city. We are also a successful participant in the American Social History Project sponsored by the graduate center of CUNY.

We believe that "Diversity Is Our Strength." There is no ambivalence in our commitment to the democratic values embedded in the United States.

Lourdes Burrows
Principal, Newcomers High School

Sol Stern responds:
I have no quarrel with James Piereson's view of Joy Hakim's chapter on the Reagan presidency. Had I been reviewing *A History of US*, I would have said much the same thing. My point in citing Hakim's volumes was to contrast their clear, confident narrative voice and generally optimistic and patriotic tone with the turgid multiculturalism and America-bashing that most students must endure. For those of us who still care about teaching a common national history, Lourdes Burrows's letter expresses exactly what's gone wrong: too many public school educators think teaching newcomers about the American heritage somehow means that we're dominating them.

Juvenile Justice?

To the editor:
We must respond to the lopsided content and belligerent tone of Peter Reinharz's "Juvenile Justice—Texas Style" (Spring 1998). New York's experience doesn't support his contention that juvenile crime hasn't decreased and that juvenile offenders are more lethal than ever.

In fact, violent juvenile crime has decreased 17.8 percent in the city since 1994. And New York State already has tough sentencing provisions for juvenile offenders. Youths 13 to 15 years old who commit certain violent acts are tried as adults automatically. Further, New York is one of only three states in which a child at age 16 is considered an adult for all offenses, is tried in adult court, and is sentenced to adult prison. More, research has not found that trying youths as adults and sentencing them to adult prison reduces juvenile crime or lowers recidivism rates. Last, since juvenile crime triples after school between the hours of 3:00 PM and 8:00 PM, it's incredible that New York has reduced spending on youth development and delinquency prevention programs by 20 percent since 1990.

Nancy Locker
Board of Directors
Citizens' Committee for Children

Peter Reinharz responds:
Ms. Locker fails to describe New York's law accurately. While some juveniles 13 to 15 years of age may be tried in adult court for a narrow set of violent crimes, New York State doesn't try them as adults, nor has New York State ever tried any youth as an adult. Instead, the state sentences these teens as "Juvenile Offenders"— a very different thing. Even murderers can get paroled after five years, if they're young enough. And even though New York starts adult criminal prosecutions at age 16, it grants most 16-, 17-, and 18-year-old offenders "Youthful Offender" status immediately upon sentence. The incarceration maximum—for any Youthful Offender—is one to four years.

Ms. Locker also notes that juvenile crime is down in New York. Perhaps it is. But the reduction has nothing to do with the policies Ms. Locker advocates. These practices were entrenched during the huge increase in youth crime during the late 1980s and early 1990s. If Ms. Locker is correct and spending has decreased along with the juvenile crime rate, then her argument for more social services is self-defeating. Rather than looking to social services to deal with violent thugs, credit must be given to the policing policies of the Giuliani administration.

Finally, Ms. Locker asserts that we need to do more between the hours of 3 PM and 8 PM when the bulk of juvenile crime occurs. But there already are dozens of after-school programs in every school district. Parents and other relatives ought to be the first line of defense to crime, and her call for more after-school child care only serves to abdicate parental responsibility.

City Journal *welcomes letters to the editor. Our address:* City Journal, *52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017-3802.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CHASE

Why

does a business loan come with so much paperwork, when you have too much already?

Chase realizes you can't get your real work done if you're buried in paperwork for a loan. So our business loan application is only one page, and **no financial statements are required** when applying for loans up to $50,000.

Those are just some of the ways we make things **as easy as possible** for small business owners. You also **get a credit decision in just three business days,** because we know a week is too long to wait.

To find out more about our business loans and revolving lines of credit, **call 1-800-CHASE24** or just stop by any of our 500 neighborhood branches.

The Chase **Small Business Loan.**

CHASE. The right relationship is everything.™

Loans in excess of $100,000 and SBA guaranteed loans require additional documentation and a separate closing. All loan requests are subject to credit approval.
©1997. The Chase Manhattan Bank. Member FDIC. Equal Opportunity Lender.

EQUAL HOUSING LENDER

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Contributors

Tucker Carlson is a staff writer for *The Weekly Standard*.

Theodore Dalrymple is a physician who regularly sees patients in an English prison. He is a contributing editor of *City Journal*, a columnist for the London *Spectator*, and a frequent contributor to the *Daily Telegraph*.

William A. Fischel has taught economics at Dartmouth College since 1973. He specializes in local government issues, and his most recent book is *Regulatory Takings*.

Our cover painting shows a detail from *View of Wall Street*, by Colin Campbell Cooper (1856–1937). Courtesy Sotheby's, Inc., New York.

Hilton Kramer is editor and publisher of *The New Criterion*. He was on the staff of the *New York Times* from 1965 to 1982 as chief art critic and art news editor. He is the author of *The Age of the Avant-Garde*, and *The Revenge of the Philistines*.

John Leo is a columnist for *U.S. News & World Report* and the author of *Two Steps Ahead of the Thought Police*.

Heather Mac Donald is a contributing editor of *City Journal* and John M. Olin Fellow at the Manhattan Institute. Her articles have appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*, *The New Republic*, *The New Criterion*, and the *New York Times*.

Bruno V. Manno is a senior fellow of the Hudson Institute. He's been involved in a three-year national study of charter schools.

Sally Satel is a practicing psychiatrist in Washington, D.C. She is also a lecturer at Yale University School of Medicine.

Harry Stein created *Esquire*'s Ethics column and is the author of such novels as *Hoopla* and *The Magic Bullet*. He, his wife, and his children are currently writing a syndicated column on family life.

Sol Stern, a contributing editor of *City Journal*, has written for *Commentary* and the *Wall Street Journal* and has served as a policy analyst for the governments of New York City and New York State.

David Watkin is a fellow of Peterhouse and reader in the history of architecture at the University of Cambridge. His books include *Morality and Architecture*, *A History of Western Architecture*, and *Sir John Soane: Enlightenment Thought and the Royal Academy Lectures*.

City Journal (ISSN 1060-8540) is published four times a year by the Manhattan Institute, 52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017. Telephone: (212) 599-7000. Fax: (212) 599-0371. E-mail: cj@city-journal.org. Subscription rates: one year: $19.95; two years: $34.95; back issues: $7 (10 or more, $6 each); reprints: $3.00. Subscription telephone: (800) 562-1973. For subscription complaints, write Edward Craig at the Manhattan Institute. Distributed in the United States by Bernard DeBoer, Inc., 113 East Centre Street, Nutley, NJ 07110, (973) 667-9300; Hudson News Company, 1305 Paterson Plank Road, North Bergen, NJ 07047, (201) 867-3600; International Periodical Distributors, 674 Via de la Valle, Suite 200, Solano Beach, CA 92075, (619) 481-5928; Ubiquity Distributors, 607 DeGraw Street, Brooklyn, NY 11217, (718) 875-5491.

Please visit our website at www.city-journal.org.

Signed articles express the views of their authors and are intended solely to inform and broaden public debate. They are not intended to aid or hinder legislation before legislative bodies at the municipal, state, or federal level. © 1998 by the Manhattan Institute, Inc.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lite Wisdom

John Leo

Like many people, I can deliver a competent public speech without much fuss. But a commencement address is different. I can't recall stewing about a speech as much as I did before donning academic garb and talking at the St. John's College graduation in Santa Fe on May 17.

After all, student tolerance for these speeches is at an all-time low. It was low enough in our day. Nobody my age seems to remember a single thought expressed at his or her own graduation—or even the name of the speaker. But in our time, the residue of traditional formality seemed to protect even the most pedestrian speakers, who seemed unembarrassed about doling out 15 or 20 minutes of solemn advice on the proper way to chart one's life course.

Today's discomfort with commencement speaking accounts for all the ironic commentary often built into the talks themselves. Garry Trudeau said that the real purpose of the commencement speech is to make sure that no graduates get into the real world until they have been properly sedated. William F. Buckley Jr. once told a graduating class, "Do not think of me as your commencement speaker. Think of me as the last obstacle between you and your degree." Art Buchwald warned graduates: "We're leaving you a perfect world. Don't screw it up."

One sign of the times is that Southampton College brought in Kermit the Frog as commencement speaker two years ago. Kermit was apparently the first fictional amphibian to address graduates anywhere on Long Island. One marine biology major said, "It took me $50,000 and five hard years to get here, and on my big day I have to listen to a lecture from a green sock."

Entertainment celebrities like Kermit are the latest fad in commencement speakers. Recent examples include Arnold Schwarzenegger, Yogi Berra, Jackie Mason, Sting (who received an honorary degree and emerged as Dr. Sting), and just about everybody you have ever seen in a network sitcom, including Jerry Seinfeld.

Entertainment is what today's commencement talks are all about. One friend who had just spoken at a large western university's graduation faxed me his text, which was very funny. The whole speech was humor—absolutely no uplift at all. "It's the students' day; they should have fun," he said. Besides, these new grads were weaned on sitcoms. They expect a joke every 20 seconds.

Has it come to this: that only the hilarious, the famous, or well-known TV sidekicks can talk at graduations? A Nexis search of recent commencement addresses was vaguely reassuring. Perhaps half of the talks were either humor-free or delivered by the not-yet-famous. Nexis said nothing about whether the students paid any attention.

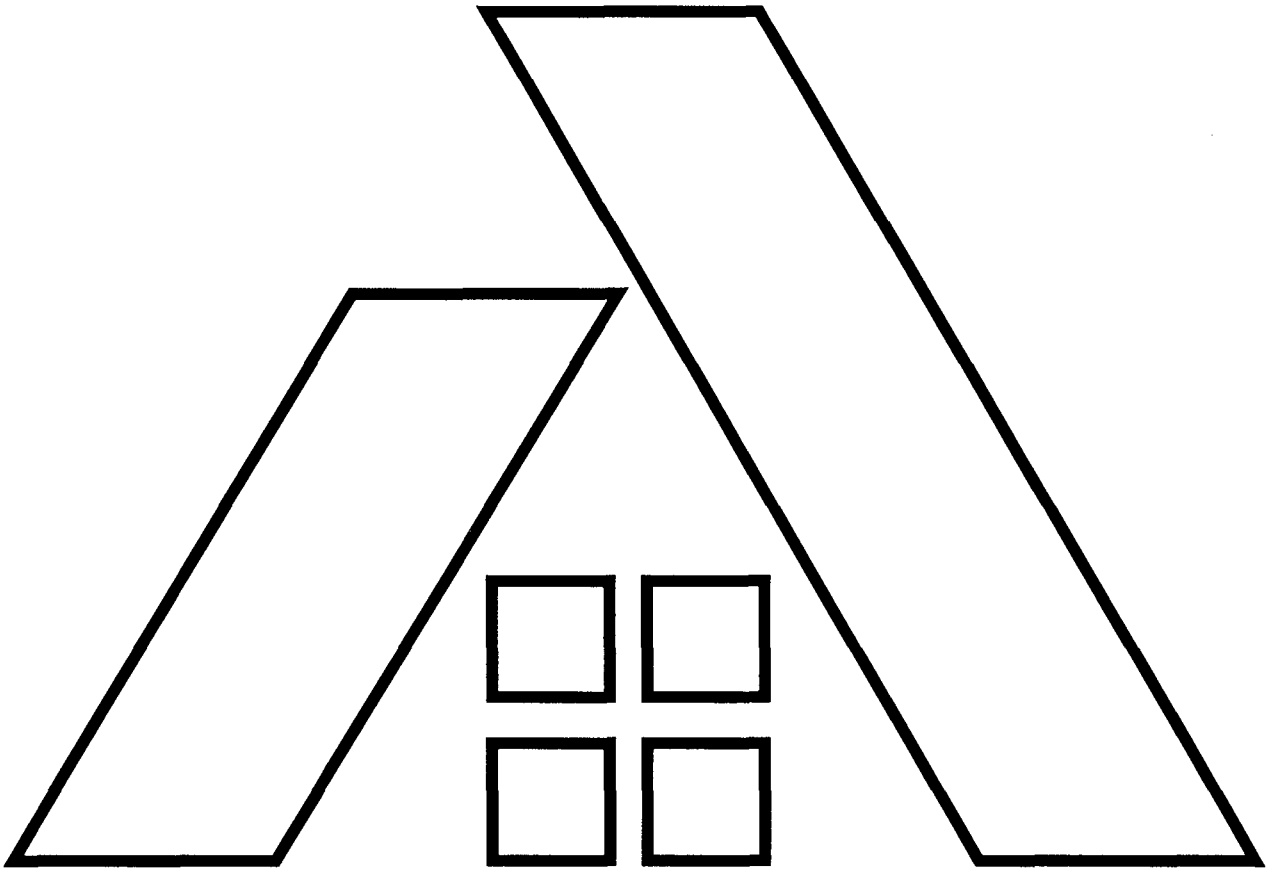
After a good deal of agonizing, I decided to open with a long section of allegedly rollicking humor, then glide as smoothly as possible into a heavy-duty adult message, which I informally called "Polonius II." The alleged humor was a send-up of the basic commencement speech, crammed with a bent version of every cliché ever inflicted by old and middle-aged speakers on the captive young. Sample line: "Years from now, when you leave your parents' homes and get your first jobs, you will realize that in a sense you have not really left St. John's. . . ."

The graduates laughed a lot, and one or two even cut in with their own one-liners. Since I had their full attention, "Polonius II" went over well, too. I talked about the emptiness of the modern no-content version of tolerance, citing the report from a professor at Hamilton College that 10 to 20 percent of his students can't bring themselves to criticize the Nazi slaughter of the Jews, since judging other cultures, however murderous, is currently regarded as wrong.

Later, a woman came up to tell me that she had attended 19 St. John's commencements, and my speech was definitely the second best. This didn't seem like the right time to argue that the commencement speech is likely to go the way of the Latin Mass. It seemed more appropriate just to beam at full throttle and thank her for the silver medal. •

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The finest in owner managed real estate properties.



At Atco, we believe that PEOPLE are our most valuable ASSET.

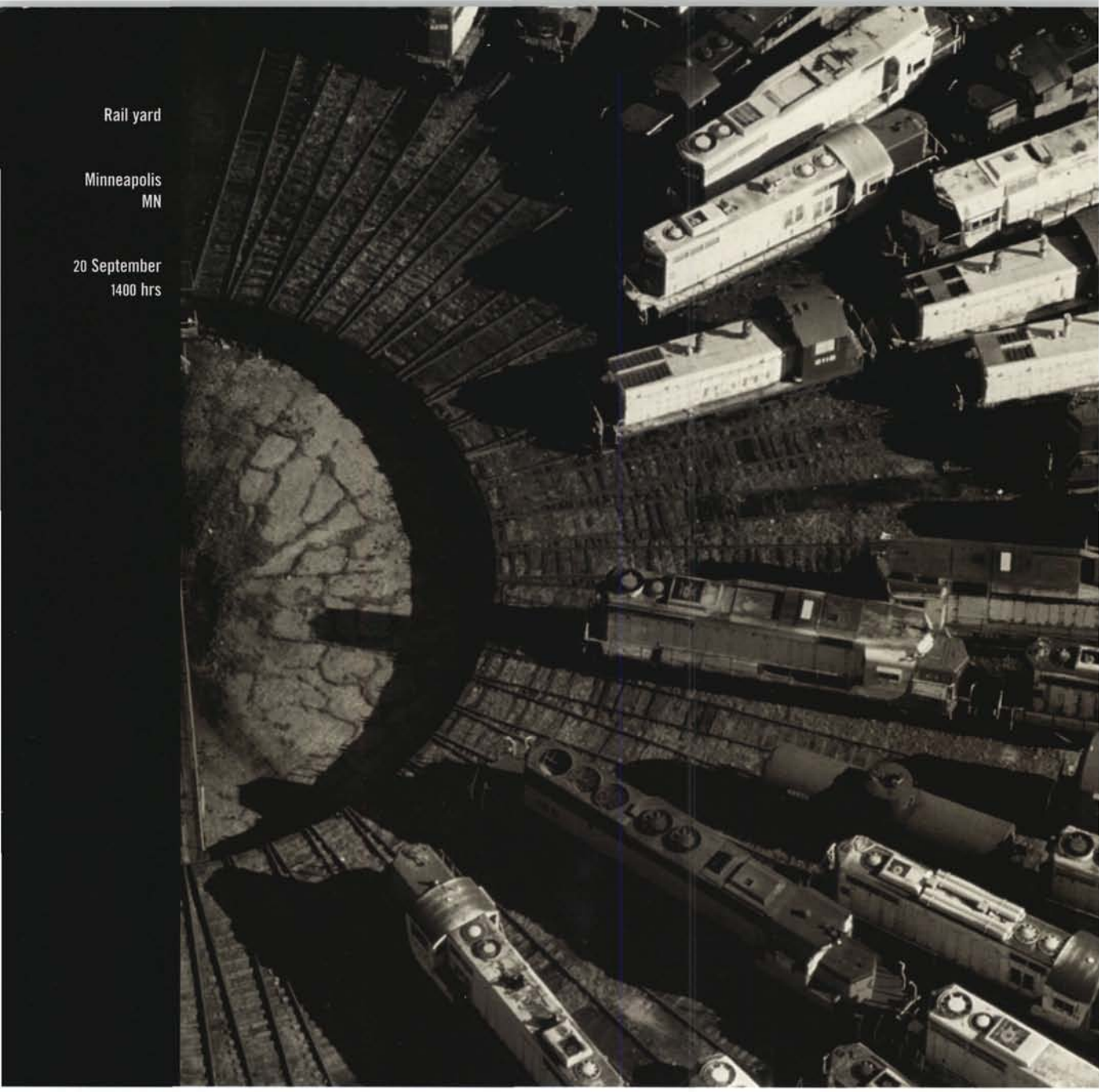
Atco Properties & Management, Inc. is owner and manager of commercial, industrial, residential and retail real estate in the New York and Phoenix areas, with more than seven decades of experience.

To us a lease is an ongoing partnership, not a one-time deal. Tenants come to view Atco managers as an essential part of everyday operations. We are quick to respond and easy to access. And through close observation and valuable suggestions, we anticipate our clients' needs to help make their businesses flourish.

ATCO
Properties & Management, Inc.

Headquarters:
555 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10017
212-687-5154 Fax: 212-682-7599

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



WITHOUT THE RIGHT COVERAGE, YOUR COMPANY CAN BE FLATTENED BY A TRAIN THAT'S STANDING STILL.

All it takes is a rail strike, a streak of bad weather or a sudden change in an exchange rate and your company's bottom line can sustain a major injury. So businesses require a partner that can anticipate and protect against multiple risks with innovative solutions.

AIG Risk Finance is that partner. With our financial resources, insurance underwriting and capital markets expertise, we can bundle together risks other financial institutions can't assume. When AIG Risk Finance combines a company's financial and insurance risk into a single program, the integrated coverage can create efficiencies that might not be realized using more traditional forms of risk management.

For instance, our Commodity-Embedded Insurance (COIN) program limits the earnings per share impact for our clients by joining traditional insurance risks with financial exposures like primary commodities, foreign exchange and interest rate fluctuations.

AIG Risk Finance, a division of the AIG Companies, has access to an unparalleled global network, with operations in approximately 130 countries and jurisdictions worldwide. And we have top financial ratings to back us up. So we'll be there to help your business stay on the right track.

AIG

WORLD LEADERS IN INSURANCE AND FINANCIAL SERVICES

American International Group, Inc., Dept. A, 70 Pine Street, New York, NY 10270 www.aig.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED